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SEPTEMBER 3
1918

VOL. 18 Nº 5

Published Twice a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of 1879.
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

1⅞ per cent. of space devoted to advertisements; and 98⅛ per cent. devoted to matter other than advertisements.

Yearly Subscription, $3.00 in advance
Single Copy, Twenty Cents

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.
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THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN

A Four-Part Story. Part I

By JACKSON GREGORY

A tale of the desert stretches of the Southwest.

IN THE DUG-OUT *A Complete Novelette*

By W. TOWNEND

A story of the trenches by a man who is in them.

THE FOAMING FORESHORE

By Samuel Alexander White

A complete novelette of stirring times on the Nova Scotia fishing banks.

EMERALDS AND BLONDIE

By Gladys E. Johnson

A complete novelette in which you meet crooks of a different order.

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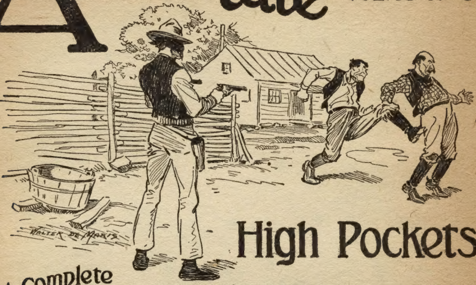

High Pockets

A Complete Novel

By William Patterson White

Author of "Longhorns," "Hidden Trails," etc.

PROLOGUE

JAKE RULE, Sheriff of Fort Creek County, and his deputy, "Kansas" Casey, were riding out of Farewell in the light of early morning. Their route led them past the rear of the stage company's corrals.

"Beats —— where a drunkard'll sleep," commented Kansas, indicating with a jerk of his thumb the prostrate form of a man sprawling beside the discarded reach and hind wheels of a freight wagon.

"Don't it?" Jake said carelessly—then swung his horse swiftly, for there was an unlifelike cast in the spread-eagled body.

The sheriff dismounted and knelt beside Casey's drunkard. The breast of the latter's blue flannel shirt was stiff with what had dried upon it. Jake's expert fingers opened and spread apart the shirt.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed Kansas, who was young and therefore emotional.

"Looks like that chest had been run through a sewin' machine," observed Jake. "Throat's cut half-through," he supplemented, with an eye to detail.

"His face!" whispered Kansas in a dry voice.

For the dead man did not have any face, that is, a face his friends could recognize. The features had been smashed and beaten to a pulpy flatness.

"Who is he?" asked Kansas.

"He's wearin' Rufe Thompson's clo'es," replied the sheriff. "Guess you dunno Rufe. He's Sile Thompson's brother. Sile's manager o' the Slash F outfit over south o' Seymour. I dunno him myself, an' I didn't know Rufe either till I had a drink with him last night. Rufe only sifted in yest'day."

While the sheriff talked his hands had been searching the dead man's clothing. He brought to light and laid at one side a silver watch, a six-shooter in a shoulder holster, a fifty-cent piece, a quarter and an unsealed letter addressed to Scotty Mackenzie of the Flying M—that ranch is situated in the valley of the Dogsoldier beyond Paradise Bend. Jake opened and read the letter.

Kansas drew the revolver from its holster and examined the cylinder. Then he

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extracted the cylinder and squinted down the gun's long barrel.

"Clean," he announced. "Five cartridges in the cylinder."

"Oh, he didn't have no more chance than a ory-eyed Injun," said Jake Rule, and tapped the letter with a blunt forefinger. "It's Rufe shore-enough. This here to Scotty is all about a bunch o' horses Sile wants to buy. Wonder why they pulled his shirt-tail out of his pants," he added irrelevantly.

"Maybe he done it when he was dyin'," suggested Kansas.

"Maybe. Yuh can't tell. Take his feet, will yuh, Kansas?"

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER

"WHO is he?" queried "Piney" Jackson, the blacksmith, leaning comfortably against the off-jamb of his wide doorway.

"I dunno," replied "Windy" Taylor, slouching on an up-ended bucket beside the cooling tub. "I've never seen him before."

"Me neither," declared the blacksmith, and scratched his shoulders heifer-wise on the wood.

"Whadda yuh wanna know for?" Listlessly.

Piney Jackson surveyed the puncher with contempt.

"Ain't you Double Diamond A fellers got *no* curiosity?" he demanded.

"Not a —— cure," grinned Windy. "We ain't got no time. We work, we do. We don't sit on our hunkers come day, go day, shoe a mule once a year, like some jiggers I know."

"Is that so?" snorted the blacksmith, and fairly upset his slow-witted brain for a suitable and crushing retort. The latter failing to materialize he dodged back to the main question. "Alla same, I'd like to know who Mister High Pockets is."

"Why don'tcha ask him? Yuh dunno, he might tell yuh."

Piney Jackson treated Mr. Taylor's flippancy with the disdain it deserved and continued to gaze diagonally across the street at the object of his curiosity. Which object was a tall, lanky man, occupying one of the two chairs on the sidewalk beneath the wooden awning of Bill Lainey's hotel. One of the chairs was filled to overflowing by that mountain of lazy flesh, Bill Lainey himself. Lainey, as was his custom, dozed with abandon. His snores and gurgles were not audible to the men in the doorway of the blacksmith shop, but they knew what he was doing.

The stranger was not sleeping. Chair tilted back against the wall, spurred heels hooked on a rung, he stared straight in front of him with a pair of humorous and washed-out gray eyes. Apparently his scrutiny was directed upon Dave Smith's pony, tied to the well-chewed post in front of the Smith residence. After a time the stranger swept the figures of the blacksmith and Mr. Taylor with a calm, impersonal glance and then looked out across the hot flat to where the trail from Marysville and the south dropped down the slope of Indian Ridge. A cloud of dust was on the trail. The northbound stage was coming in.

The stranger's eyes switched back to the pony tied to the post. He fished with lean brown fingers in a pocket of his vest, produced the makings and rolled a cigaret, employing for that purpose both hands.

When he had blown out his first deep inhale, the white teeth beneath the stubby brown mustache showed in a slow half-smile, a smile that faded as slowly as it came. For the stranger was missing nothing of Messrs. Jackson's and Taylor's studiedly unobtrusive stares. And they amused him, those stares. He had played draw with the blacksmith and two of the latter's friends in the Happy Heart the evening before, and he had taken their money away from them. This also had amused him. A beneficent Providence having blessed him with a spacious talent for poker and its by-products, he was frequently enabled to derive from life much innocent pleasure and more coin of the realm, which was proper.

A trickle of passers-by crossed the stranger's field of vision: Mike Flynn, the one-legged owner of the Blue Pigeon Store, with a seafaring roll in his walk that even a brass-bound mahogany pegleg could not eradicate; plump Mrs. Rule, the sheriff's wife, intent on dotted calico and baking-powder; the amiable owner of the Canton Restaurant, tall Sing Luey, resplendent in black silk trousers and embroidered over-shirt, meditatively sucking the mouthpiece of his yard-long silver-mounted pipe, intent on heaven knew what dream of his own home-town; and pale-faced Mr. Tom Stute, frock-coated, wearing a shirt of many pleats and his perennial smile. Clean-shaven, handsome, debonair to a degree, Mr. Stute, proprietor and manager of the Dewdrop Dance-Hall, was a picture to fill any one's eye.

The stranger surveyed the march past of Mr. Stute from beneath half-closed eyelids. He was not sure that he liked Mr. Stute. Shooting at random, as it were, he believed he preferred that inscrutable Celestial, Sing Luey, to Mr. Stute. There was that about the dance-hall person, a subtle cocksureness among other little traits, that grated. The stranger had not the pleasure of Mr. Stute's acquaintance, nor did he greatly care for Chinamen, but he had a vast and childlike faith in his own instinct.

A thudding patter drummed across the heat waves of the flat. The stranger looked southward along the trail. A quarter-mile away, dimly visible through rolling clouds of dust, the legs of the stage horses were twinkling in a frantic gallop. Came the pistol-like crack of a whip—once, twice, and again. "Whisky Jim" was encouraging his teams. Whisky Jim whooped a series of shrill whoops.

"Must be haulin' a woman," the stranger, wise as to the practise of stage-drivers, concluded.

Creaking and swaying, curtains flapping, the stage whirled past. With a hearty shout, Whisky Jim straightened a leg on the brake lever and swayed back on the bunched reins. The stage ground to a halt in front of the stage station. Whisky Jim set the brake and climbed down. The stranger watched lazily. Whisky Jim opened the stage door, stretched in a long arm and dragged out a large valise.

"Ladies first!" bawled Whisky Jim, as a trousered leg appeared, the foot feeling for the step.

The leg and foot jerked backward, disappeared, and then slowly, hesitatingly, the slim figure of a girl in dusty dark blue stepped out and down. She was a little thing, this girl. The stranger decided as he looked at her standing there beside her great valise, that she possessed the smallest feet he had ever seen.

The owner of the trousered leg that had annoyed Whisky Jim scuttled out with a cautious eye to the stage driver and vanished within the Happy Heart Saloon. Whisky Jim turned to help the Wells Fargo guard with the express box and the mail-bags. The girl stood beside her valise and gazed upon the false fronts of Farewell.

"Don't she belong to nobody?" the stranger asked himself, and removed his heels from the chair rung.

Mr. Stute hurried out into the street and approached the girl. Mr. Stute achieved a low bow and a hat flourish. It must be said that Mr. Stute had title to certain airs and graces. Mr. Stute, his head bent deferentially, spoke at some length to the girl. The stranger could not hear what he was saying.

"Dance-hall floozie," he said to himself, and rehooked his heels. "Must belong to Stute."

He set himself to the rolling of a fresh cigaret. He had lost all interest in the girl.

But the interest returned full force when, presently, came toward him along the sidewalk Mr. Stute and the girl. Now the stranger had a fair view of her face. It was not a beautiful face, but it was a sweet face, and the expression made it very lovely. There was strength in the wide mouth and firm chin. There was sadness in the wide-set dark eyes as she glanced at the stranger in passing. Promptly he revised his previous estimate.

"She never was in a dance-hall in her life," he told himself.

Mr. Stute awakened Bill Lainey and informed the hotel proprietor that the lady desired a room.

"Not an expensive room," put in the girl. "I—I can't pay very much."

"Rooms all the same price," said Bill Lainey, heaving himself erect. "They's only two—eight beds in each, dollar a bed a day."

At which the girl looked blank, and Mr. Stute drew Mr. Lainey aside and whispered in his ear.

"All right," wheezed Bill, and spoke to the girl. "Yuh can have the young-un's room. Four-bits a day."

"Four-bits?" repeated the girl uncomprehendingly.

"Fifty cents," explained Bill Lainey.

"I don't understand if beds are one dollar a day, how——"

"That's all right," Mr. Stute assured her, clapping Bill on the shoulder. "That's a-all right. My friend, Mister Lainey, is making you a special rate. Special rates to tourists, you know. Mister Lainey did not know you were a tourist—at first."

"But——"

"Don't think of it further, madam. The matter is settled. You must be tired. Mister Lainey will conduct you to your room at once."

The girl attempted to thank Mr. Stute. He raised a deprecating hand.

"Don't mention it, madam. No trouble at all. Delighted to have been of service. I may see you again—later. I hope—I may. Thank you, Bill, here's the lady's bag."

Lainey and the girl went into the hotel. Mr. Stute, curling his mustache with satisfied fingers, strolled away toward his dance-hall. The stranger watched the smoke curl upward from the end of his cigaret.

"An' yo're gonna see her again, are yuh?" he said under his breath. "I wonder whyfor."

CHAPTER II

A JOB

THE stranger saw the girl at supper. She sat opposite, an empty chair on either hand. The few diners, stray punchers and the stage station employees, ate with diffidence. They were not accustomed to women of the girl's species.

The stranger surreptitiously watched her while she ate. He was glad that she had removed her hat. He enjoyed looking at her hair. It was so darkly brown and smooth and shiny. The girl's appetite could have been better. She merely pecked at the sowbelly and beans, but she ate all her canned tomatoes and drank two cups of the terrifically strong coffee.

The meal over, the girl disappeared. The stranger, in his chair on the sidewalk could hear her moving about her room. After a time all sound of movement ceased. Later the stranger thought he heard stifled sobbing. But he could not be sure.

Came then through the dusk Mr. Stute, walking rapidly. He entered the hotel. Bill Lainey was indoors cleaning his rifle.

"Where's the little lady?" inquired Mr. Stute.

"In her room," replied Bill, to the accompaniment of a squirted oil can's double click.

"Ask her if she'll see me."

The Lainey feet shuffled across the floor. The Lainey knuckles rapped on a door.

"Gent to see yuh, ma'am," said Bill. "He's the gent brung yuh here—Mister Tom Stute."

The stranger leaned across his chair arm and nearer the doorway. He could not catch the girl's answer. Her voice was pitched too low.

"Says she can't see nobody now," Bill told Mr. Stute.

Mr. Stute came out and went away. The set of his head and shoulders hinted at displeasure. The stranger waited a long five minutes. Then he followed in the wake of the dance-hall proprietor to the latter's place of business.

The shank of the evening was but beginning in the Dewdrop. The fiddler on his table was sawing out the merry strains of "Zip Coon" in perfunctory fashion. Windy Taylor was endeavoring to waltz with a painted blonde and making a boggy ford of it. It was evident that the Double Diamond A puncher had had several. The blonde was making fun of him. As they slid past the doorway she expertly disengaged herself and propelled Windy to the bar. They drank, and the blonde added another check to her string.

There were five women in the Dewdrop Dance-Hall, good-looking and light-footed females all of them, well-assorted too—a pair of blondes, two brunettes, and a red-haired girl. For Mr. Stute knew the value of display advertising.

The stranger draped himself against the bar and poured out a modest two fingers.

"Buy me a drink, dearie."

It was the red-haired girl, a full-bosomed Cyprian with excellent teeth. She was nudging his elbow.

"Help yoreself," he said, and eyed her indifferently.

"Le's dance," she invited, when she had swallowed her liquor.

"I dunno how," he equivocated.

"I'll teach yuh." She laid a plump hand on his arm.

"Yuh dunno what yo're sayin'," he grinned. "Once a girl tried to teach me to dance, an' she's been walkin' lame ever since."

"That's all right," she giggled. "Come along."

But the stranger would not, and the red-haired creature left him to essay her wiles on Tom Barton of the Hogpen outfit. The stranger sipped his whisky and stared into the long mirror behind the bar. He could see the reflection of Mr. Stute in the mirror. Mr. Stute was talking to one "Longhorn" Simms, a swarthy citizen with a broken nose.

Mr. Simms was a person of some local reputation. He ran the games in the Happy Heart Saloon. He had killed two men in the way of his profession and wore derringers in his vest-pockets. The name Longhorn fitted. He was excessively hard. Now he was smiling—as the wolf smiles when it licks its jaws. Mr. Stute was chuckling. He was apparently telling Mr. Simms a story both pithy and pointed. "Zip Coon" drowned his words.

The stranger moved across the room to a window adjacent to the gambler and the story-teller. He put his hand on the sill and looked out into the night.

"Tomorrow I'll turn the trick," Mr. Stute was saying. "I don't know but that I'll keep her myself—for a while. She's too good for the floor now."

"Yuh'll have to work it easy-like." Thus Longhorn Simms, spitting at a crack.

"Easy's where I live."

"If she's good like yuh think, it won't be no cinch. I knowed a good woman once. Couldn't budge her. I know."

"I'll budge this one. She hasn't any money to speak of. And she hasn't a friend in the Territory. I got that much out of her. Do you see it? Not a friend in the Territory."

"An' you'll be her friend." The wolfish smile on the mouth of Mr. Simms turned sarcastic.

"I sure will."

"Betcha fifty yuh get the mitten."

"Make it a hundred, and give me two days."

"Shore. A hundred an' two days goes. Le's irrigate."

The two crossed to the bar. The stranger sat down on the window sill. Ten minutes later he left the dance-hall and went to the Happy Heart to play stud.

The stranger rose late the following morning. He was alone in the eight-bedded room. The other guests, two punchers and a stray-man, were at breakfast. When he had pulled on his boots, and settled his hair with a sweep of his hand, he took his six-shooter from its holster and drew out the cylinder. He inspected the five cartridges, replaced the cylinder, and carefully settled the hammer on the empty chamber. He shoved the weapon into its holster, buckled on the belt, and tied down the holster. As every one knows, tying down a holster makes for a sure draw. Gun-fighters employ this procedure extensively.

Which being done the stranger went to his war-bags where they lay on the floor, opened them and pulled from beneath his extra shirt the mate to the six-shooter on his right leg. This firearm he treated precisely as he had the other, save that when it was in readiness for action he shoved it down inside the waistband of his trousers, so that it cuddled his body slightly ahead of the right hip-bone.

From the other half of his war-bags he produced a heavy-bladed, thin-handled bowie. This knife he inserted in a leather sheath cunningly sewn into the back of his vest high up at the neck on the right-hand side. Then he put on the vest, wriggled his shoulders till the bowie lay snugly where it should, and went down to breakfast.

The girl was the sole occupant of the dining-room. When he pulled out his chair, she returned his greeting timidly her eye on her plate. The stranger ate hurriedly, but the girl finished before he did and went out into the street.

The stranger set down his half-emptied coffee-cup and walked to the doorway. Standing well back he watched her enter the Blue Pigeon Store. He waited till she came out and started back toward the hotel. Then he slid through the doorway and dropped into his accustomed chair. When she passed him on her way in he saw that she held in her hand a few spools of thread and a paper of needles.

"Gonna do a li'l sewin'," he told himself. "She's gonna stay some while, anyhow."

In a few minutes he heard the *snip-snip* of scissors. He smiled his slow half-smile and rolled a cigaret.

Bill Lainey shuffled past the corner of the hotel.

"Yore hoss an' Dolan's mule is fightin'," he wheezed, "an' me, I've gotta go to the store for the wife."

The stranger swore and ran 'round the building to the corral. On the way he picked up a five-foot length of two-by-four. Bill Lainey had told the truth. Rear, strike, whirl, kick and recover, the mule and the stranger's hammer-headed yellow were going it tooth and hoof. Handling the two-by-four as if it were a lath the stranger hammered Dolan's mule and his own horse on the nose with charming impartiality. But it was a grudge fight and both brutes were red-eyed with rage. They minded him not at all at first, and only his natural agility saved him from being brained.

He beat them apart at last, whacked them soundly over their rumps and drove them to their respective corners. He climbed upon the top bar of the gate and sat, the two-by-four across his knees, awaiting the return of the fighting spirit. But the two animals had had enough. They were content to sulk where they stood and tenderly shake their aching heads. The stranger watched them grimly for a space. Then he dropped the two-by-four, climbed down, and returned to his chair in front of the hotel.

THE Dewdrop Dance-Hall lay on the same side of Main Street as Lainey's Hotel. Almost directly opposite the dance-hall was Sing Luey's Canton Restaurant. The dance-hall's windows and doors were all open, front and rear. Tall Sing Luey, standing in his doorway, had a fairly comprehensive view of the interior of that dance-hall. Sing Luey, sucking his long pipe, which no one had ever seen him smoke, stood motionless, his legs widespread.

Suddenly he stepped down on the sidewalk and shuffled across the street in the direction of Lainey's Hotel. In front of Daly's place he halted and became deeply absorbed in the antics of Dolan's chained bear as it vigorously hunted itself for fleas. A few minutes later Sing Luey passed on and paused beside the stranger's chair.

"Fine day," said Sing Luey.

The stranger stared at the Chinaman in frank surprise. Sing Luey's accent was not the Chinese accent to which he was accustomed. He nodded curtly.

"Yeah," said the stranger.

Sing Luey smiled balmily and caressed the tiny bowl of his pipe.

"I have some very fine *li-chi* nuts," went on Sing Luey. "They arrived from China only last week. I should like you to try those nuts."

The stranger continued to stare. The yellow face beamed down upon him.

"We do not all talk the pidgin," he said gently.

"I can see that easy, but——"

"Those nuts are—excellent."

The right eyelid of the Chinaman half-dropped.

"I dunno what yo're drivin' at," puzzled the stranger.

"You need not come beyond the doorway if you do not wish," Sing Luey persisted. "If you do not come you may be sorry." He broke off, his inscrutable eyes holding those of the stranger. "You will come, please," he added softly, and turned on his slippered heel.

The stranger got unhurriedly to his feet. He hitched up his trousers and kicked the kinks out of his long legs. Briskly he crossed the street, caught up with Sing Luey, passed him and entered the Canton. The dining-room was empty. From the kitchen came the sound of shifted pots and pans and the *shush* of disturbed water. The stranger leaned back against the wall.

In slipped Sing Luey and stood beside a front window, his eyes on the dance-hall opposite.

"About them nuts—" began the stranger.

"Perhaps the nuts can wait," the Celestial suggested smoothly. "Perhaps something else can not wait."

"Say, lookit here!" The stranger was becoming annoyed.

"I think that a woman needs the help of a man," said Sing Luey quietly, ignoring the other's ire. "The woman that arrived by stage last night," he continued, speaking rapidly. "Mr. Stute has her in the dance-hall."

"Them nuts shore can wait," observed the stranger, and departed in haste.

The stranger walked quickly through the dance-hall doorway. The girl and Mr. Stute were the sole occupants of the large front room. Even the bartender was absent from his post. Mr. Stute seemed annoyed at the stranger's entry. He glanced sharply at the intruder. Then, as if by an afterthought, smiled slightly and nodded to him. The stranger went to the bar. Mr. Stute continued his conversation with the girl.

"You say you can play the piano," said Mr. Stute. "Fine. I've ordered one. Ordered it a month ago. It should be here today or tomorrow. I didn't know what to do for a pianist. Here you arrive, you are one, and you need work. It is Providential, nothing less than that. It'll be easy work, only four hours a night, and I'll pay forty a week. Forty dollars a week for only twenty-eight hours work. I've a fine place here. You'll find my—er—employees nice, congenial people, and I'll look out for you myself and see that you're happy and contented. I really wish to help you all I can, madam. What do you say?"

"She says she'd like to see the bill o' ladin' for that piano first," the stranger answered for her.

"Wha-what do you mean?" Mr. Stute, caught off guard for once in his life, could not help but stutter.

"Figure it out," said the stranger.

Mr. Stute stepped in front of the girl. She stood back, eying the stranger uncertainly.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Mr. Stute.

The stranger, leaning against the bar, had hooked his right thumb in the armhole of his vest. His left hand was close to the waistband of his trousers.

"If yo're gonna take a chance, get out o' line with the lady," advised the stranger pleasantly.

"I never take chances," replied Mr. Stute.

"So I've heard." Thus the stranger easily.

"I don't intend to now."

"That's real bright o' yuh. Alla same, s'pose yuh move a yard to yore left. It'll be more friendly."

Mr. Stute hesitated. Then he laughed hardily and moved the required yard.

"Ma'am," said the stranger, without removing his eye from Mr. Stute, "yuh wouldn't wanna job in this shack. It ain't no place for a lady, not nohow. Stute was funnin' yuh, I guess. Wasn't yuh, Mister Stute?"

"Why, see here—" began Mr. Stute.

"Just say yes," interrupted the stranger.

Again Mr. Stute hesitated.

"I can see what yo're thinkin'," said the stranger. "Don't gamble with me. I don't feel like gamblin'. Not today. Talk quick."

The pupils of the washed-out gray eyes were narrowed to pin-points. Mr. Stute turned to the girl. She had shrunk back against the wall. She looked frightened to death.

"This gentleman seems to be a friend of yours," said Mr. Stute. "He apparently speaks with authority. I will not question his right now. At a more favorable time, perhaps. I regret to say, madam, that my offer is no longer open." Mr. Stute turned from the girl and added, looking sidewise at the stranger, "The audience will please pass out quietly."

"It will," indorsed the stranger. "Both of it. After you, ma'am."

The girl went out silently, her hands twisted together in front of her. The stranger oozed backward through the doorway. On the sidewalk he paused and addressed the immobile Mr. Stute.

"I'm glad you listened to reason," he said.

"Keep feeling that way as long as you can," Mr. Stute tossed back.

The stranger grinned and nodded, and hurried to overtake the girl. When he reached her side she looked up into his face. Her eyes were shining with unshed tears. Her upper lip was caught between her teeth.

"Will yuh gimme a chance to explain?" the stranger begged earnestly.

Pitifully she nodded.

"'Tsall right then. They's a place out back o' Lainey's corral where we can sit on a old wagon-box an' be right private. Le's go there."

CHAPTER III

SING LUEY

THE stranger was not an adept at explanations—especially an explanation of this character to a woman of this class. But he did the best he knew and did it well. The girl kept silence while he spoke, her eyes on his face. When he finished she said in a low tone:

"I've heard of dance-halls, of course, but I never thought they could be so very dreadful if—if a girl was careful. I guess I didn't know. He seemed very kind."

"Gents like that are—for a while. Take my word for it, ma'am, he's a snake. An' he don't rattle."

"I don't know what to do. I must—must do something."

Was that terror mingled with the sadness in her eyes? The stranger could not be certain.

"Don't yuh know nobody yuh can go to?" he asked gently.

She shook her head, and looked down at the hands lying idly in her lap. The stranger pushed back his hat and raised perplexed eyes to the sky. Here was a pleasant problem.

"I'm a stranger here like you," he said at last. "But I'll get yuh a job or break a leg. That is, if yo're shore yuh want to stay here."

"I'll have to stay here," she said dully. "I mean this place is as good as any."

She glanced at him apprehensively.

He nodded reassuringly.

"Yuh mustn't be afraid," he told her. "Nobody won't bother yuh no more. I'll fix that."

"I'm not afraid." She smiled wanly.

"That's right. Don'tcha worry now. Everythin's gonna turn out fine as frawg's hair in August, an' that's average fine," he added whimsically.

She smiled at him again, but the smile faded quickly. She shivered a little, and it was a hot day.

"I don't know your name," said she shyly.

"Henderson — Bill Henderson's my name."

"Mine is Joy Blythe."

"That's shore a right pretty name. Sounds kind o' happy-like."

"Does it?"

"Shore does. Now lookit here, Miss Blythe. I'd go into the hotel if I was you an' sort o' stay there. Me, I'm gonna frisk 'round an' rustle you a real job."

"You're very good."

Which remark struck Mr. Henderson speechless and made him all warm within. He walked awkwardly at her side to the door of the hotel, and stood in silence as she went in. When he heard the door of her room close he sought out Bill Lainey who was dolefully peeling potatoes under the kitchen window.

"The wife's ailin' today," said Bill apologetically, "an' I gotta help her out. An' I'm needin' sleep bad. I always sleep in the mornin's. Can't seem to get enough at night. Runnin' a hotel is shore work."

"Ain't it a fright," assented Henderson and lowered his voice. "The li'l lady inside is a friend o' mine, an' I'd take it as a personal favor if yuh'd keep an eye skinned for her. Kind o' lookout her game when I ain't 'round an' lemme know if any jigger bothers her. I ain't aimin' to have her bothered."

"That Tom Stute," observed Mr. Lainey, and spat upon the ground significantly.

"He won't bother her."

"Oh," said Mr. Lainey and looked wise.

"I want for her to keep on livin' in that room o' hers as long as she likes—at four-bits a day."

"Tom Stute was gonna pay the difference."

"I'm payin' the difference, see? An' don't you never let her find it out neither."

"I won't," Lainey assured him hastily. "The difference'll be a dollar four-bits."

"Here's forty-five wheels. When that's gone lemme know. Maybe now I won't be in town on the dot, but I'll be 'round later all right, an' I'm expectin' to find her here."

"She'll be here," said Mr. Lainey, and dropped the gold pieces chinkingly into his pockets.

Mr. Henderson nodded, pulled his hat straight, and set about winning that job.

His opening move was rather odd. He did not return to the street. Instead he walked along the haphazard rears of the buildings fronting on the thoroughfare. He kept his shoulder to the wall as much as possible. His manner was wary.

Near the collection of cribs at the back of the dance-hall he paused. From the cribs drifted the sound of feminine voices wrangling drearily one with another. Henderson turned at right angles to his former course and slid into the narrow space between the side wall of the Dewdrop and Dolan's warehouse. He ducked beneath the windows till he reached the one nearest the street.

Beneath this window he halted and, bent double, affected to fasten a spur. This for the benefit of any one passing in the street. Within the dance-hall he heard the voices of Mr. Stute and his bartender. Mr. Stute was damning the world in general and a certain man in particular. The bartender was indorsing every word with the utmost heartiness.

"Guess they's only the two of 'em," hazarded Henderson.

He felt of his weapons, dodged 'round the corner of the dance-hall and entered by way of the front door. Mr. Stute and the bartender were alone in the room. They made no movement. For Henderson had jerked the gun on his leg, and a remarkably cold and washed-out gray eye was glinting at them along the sights.

"You said somethin' about the audience passin' out quietly a while ago," observed Mr. Henderson. "S'pose you be the audience now an' pass out like you said after me. I don't mean you, barkeep. Just you stand right still, an' keep yore hands flat on the bar. That's right. Come along, Stute."

He backed streetward. Mr. Stute, hands held level with his shoulders, followed as if hypnotized. Henderson tolled Mr. Stute along the sidewalk to Dolan's warehouse in front of which he halted.

"Now you an' me can have a talk," Mr. Henderson said genially.

"You have the drop," fretted Mr. Stute.

"Yuh noticed it?" grinned Mr. Henderson. "Yuh wasn't expectin' me quite so soon, huh? I just guessed I'd sift in an' see was yuh holdin' any hard feelin's."

"All I want is an even break," snapped Mr. Stute.

"Yuh got it, feller." Henderson slipped the six-shooter into its holster.

WHICH was enough to satisfy the most exacting of persons. It satisfied Mr. Stute. His hand streaked to the gun-butt under his coat. Henderson's left hand moved slightly. His vest flew open. There was a spitting flash and a bang, and Mr. Stute, his undischarged weapon shot out of his fingers, staggered sidewise to the warehouse wall, holding a numbed forearm. Mr. Henderson gazed upon Mr. Stute with interest.

"The hand is quicker than the eye," said Mr. Henderson succinctly. "An' that's somethin' else yuh've learned today." He stepped close in to Mr. Stute and stared into that temporarily subdued person's close-set eyes. "The li'l lady at Lainey's ain't to be bothered, Stute," he continued in a harsh whisper. "Walk 'round her. Walk way 'round her. The next time it might not be yore gun."

Came then the marshal, red-faced and out of breath.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

Mr. Henderson surveyed the officer frostily.

"I don't see nothin' the matter," said he. "Do you?"

The marshal, a man of small force, glanced uncertainly from Henderson to Mr. Stute and back to Henderson.

"This here gun-play—" began the marshal.

"Was an even break," interrupted Mr. Henderson smoothly. "Stute ain't scratched. If he takes care of his health he'd ought to live a long while an' get fat an' sassy like the rest of us. Yo're late, Marshal. Right now I've got business."

He turned his back on Mr. Stute and the marshal and diagonalled across the street to the Happy Heart Saloon. The score or more witnesses of the foregoing issue at arms relaxed their tense attitudes.

Windy Taylor jingled a spurred heel and spoke out of the corner of his mouth to the Kid's Twin, a Bar S puncher.

"It don't seem possible, do it, Twin?"

The Kid's Twin smiled and licked his lips cat-fashion before replying—

"Yuh can gamble Stute thinks it do."

Windy wagged his head.

"Tom is reckoned some swift on the draw," said he.

"He was," corrected the Kid's Twin.

In the Happy Heart Saloon, Henderson, sitting at the table farthest from the door, wrestled with his problem over a small drink. Customers, most of them, looked upon him with friendly eyes. A few, these boon-companions of Mr. Stute, eyed him askance. He, a stranger, had shattered their idol. None, however, offered to take up the dance-hall person's quarrel. They wondered what Henderson was thinking about. He seemed so completely engrossed in his thoughts. Sat and stared at his liquor without drinking it. Which was unnatural.

"Maybe he's thinkin' about what Tom'll do to him," hazarded Ben Skeel, one of Mr. Simms' dealers, to his employer.

Longhorn Simms laughed sarcastically and lit a long cigar.

"Yo're a kid, Ben," said Mr. Simms. "High Pockets ain't the kind to waste his time."

"Djuh know him?"

"Not me. Never seen him before in my life. But I got eyes, an' I know a real shore-enough stingin' lizard when I see him. Them kind don't worry about no future—not till she comes. An' I dunno as they worry much then," Mr. Simms added critically.

Came noon and the habitués of the place departed to eat. Henderson remained where he was. He had arrived at no solution yet. An hour later he raked up an idea. From the idea he evolved a plan, an amazingly simple plan. He arose, leaving his untouched drink on the table, and went to the Canton for dinner.

The few guests had finished and gone when he entered. A small, fat Chinaman was taking up the used dishes and cutlery. Sing Luey sucked his pipe by the window. Henderson sat down and gave his order. The fat Chinaman went into the kitchen. Sing Luey padded across to Henderson's table. Henderson nodded. Sing Luey smiled till his eyes closed.

"The night air," observed Sing Luey, opening his eyes with a suddenness that was startling, "is apt to be unhealthy in Farewell."

"Yeah?"

"Unless one has eyes in the back of one's head."

"My idea exactly," said Mr. Henderson solemnly. "Me, I got lots o' eyes."

"I am glad." Thus, simply, Sing Luey, and returned to his post at the window.

Henderson ate his steak and potatoes and found both excellently American. The coffee was above par. It was ranch-cook coffee, and every one knows what that means. Henderson was pleasantly surprised. He said as much to Sing Luey when he paid the bill.

"We strive to please," beamed Sing Luey.

"Yuh done me a man's-size favor this mornin'," said Henderson. "I ain't forgettin'."

"Don't mention it," deprecated Sing Luey.

"Yuh must 'a' been kind o' watchin' a certain game almighty close," Henderson drawled curiously.

"The methods of the gentleman opposite have never been to my liking." Sing Luey was not smiling now.

"I see," said Henderson, who didn't quite. "Ever see me before?"

"Once or twice."

"Where?"

"Seymour City."

"Know the Cross T an' Slash F outfits south of Seymour?"

"I was cook at the Cross T ranch-house for three months, a year and a half ago."

"Then I've heard o' yuh. Yuh shore put cookin' on the map in that ranch-house. Yore name wasn't Sing Luey down there."

"Names are inconvenient at times," smiled the Celestial.

"Yeah," drawled the other. "My name's Bill Henderson 'round here."

"Of course," nodded Sing Luey.

"I guess maybe we understand each other."

"Surely."

Mr. Henderson appeared to ponder a moment.

"So that's why yuh picked me out?" he said suddenly.

"Yes," replied Sing Luey. "I knew that not a man in town would care to cross the gentleman opposite. But a stranger, one who did not know him, might possibly run the risk. I have been watching you since your arrival in Farewell. I saw you look at the young lady. It seemed to me that you were promising."

"Tha-nks," drawled Henderson, not in the least put out by the Chinaman's frank statement. "I'm shore obliged a lot, an' I'm free to admit I like yore style."

He surveyed the Celestial a moment, keen speculation in his gray eyes. Then he made his decision. He resolved to trust Sing Luey. Why not? He must trust somebody, and Sing Luey had made it exceedingly manifest that he could be trusted.

"I guess yuh know the fellers in the town pretty well, huh?" questioned Henderson.

"I have lived here eight months."

"Long enough. They's three stores here —Calloway's, Dolan's, an' the Blue Pigeon. Calloway, Dolan, an' the Blue Pigeon feller—will they stand the acid?"

"I've heard that Calloway agrees to everything one says."

"That leaves Dolan an' the other jigger. What about them?"

"They can not be walked over."

"Can't be rode, huh? That's good hearin'. Do they get drunk a lot, go hellin' 'round—the like o' that?"

"Dolan is a man of regular habit—drunk on Mondays, always. Cruel to his horses, too."

"Cross out Mister Dolan. Blue Pigeon's the only card left to draw to. Any bad wrinkles?"

"Mister Mike Flynn, the owner of the

Blue Pigeon Store, is a man of his word. He is never known to drink. His heart is as big as himself. To tell you the truth, had you failed this morning, I should have explained matters to Mister Flynn, although he is abominably slow on the draw. He prefers a shotgun."

"I guess maybe Mister Flynn has his points. A shotgun ain't to be sneezed at. Can he keep his mouth shut?"

"Like a Chinaman."

Henderson nodded and turned to go.

"I'll be seein' yuh again," he added over his shoulder.

NO ONE was visible when Henderson entered the Blue Pigeon Store, but a scrabbling noise behind and underneath the counter betokened the presence of the proprietor.

"I'll be topside one-time, whoever yuh are," grunted a muffled voice. "Me pipe's fell through a knot-hole, an' I'm sweepin' for the —— thing."

"No hurry," said Henderson, and looked about him.

Neatness is not the rule in the average store on the Western frontier. But the Blue Pigeon was marvelously clean and tidy. A wide counter bordered two sides and the back of the store proper. Behind the counter tiers of packed shelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling. Between the counter and the shelves knotted ropes, at intervals of a yard, depended from the rafters. Above the canvas-curtained doorway at the rear hung a beautifully-made model of a black-hulled slim-sparred clipper.

A gurgle of triumph from behind the counter, a thump and a scrape, and the proprietor bobbed into sight with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box. He was fondling with stumpy broad fingers a short and shiny clay.

"I'd not have lost this for a lot," declared Mike Flynn. "Not if I had to shift the shack to get it. An' what can I do for yuh?"

He tucked the pipe tenderly into the breast pocket of his blue flannel shirt and rested both hamlike hands palms down on the counter. A wide, heavy-shouldered citizen was Mike Flynn, with a red bullet-head, a chest like a barrel and thick, muscular arms. His sleeves were stagged off at the elbows. Long-tailed dragons and geishas, both beasts and ladies in four colors, were tattooed on those corded forearms in the best Japanese fashion. An open-mouthed tiger's head gaped upon the back of each hand.

"Kind o' fancy, ain't they?" Mike Flynn remarked with pride, noting the direction of Henderson's glance. "Cost me four months' pay in Yokohama. An' what is it yuh want?"

"My name's Henderson, an' I got a proposition," was the answer.

"If it's mines I ain't buyin' a share," Mike averred hastily. "Cattle likewise."

The keen blue eyes beneath the red-thatched brows gazed suspiciously upon Mr. Henderson. The latter laughed.

"Nothin' like that," Henderson assured the other. "This here proposition is to help a lady."

"Huh?" Doubtfully.

"Djuh see the li'l lady that arrove in the stage yest'day?"

"Shore."

"She needs a job bad. She's gotta have one. No two ways about that. Tom Stute offered her work."

"The —— —— —— ——!" Regarding his opinion of the dance-hall proprietor Mike Flynn left nothing to the imagination.

"He's worse'n that," concurred Henderson. "He took back his offer later."

Mike Flynn's eyes grew bright with interest.

"I wasn't out in the street this mornin'," said he, "but I heard somethin' about Stute havin' a fraycas wit' a stranger. An' yo're him?"

"I had a li'l talk with Stute," Henderson admitted with becoming modesty.

"Shake!" cried Mike Flynn heartily, and clamped hands with Henderson. "There'd be no grief if yuh'd killed him, the scut. Why didn't yuh?"

"Not necessary—yet," said Henderson, sliding his right hand behind his back and wiggling the fingers rapidly, for all feeling had quite gone out of them.

"It will be necessary, I'm thinkin'." Earnestly.

"Maybe. We'll see. About the li'l lady's job now. I figure the Blue Pigeon is the best place in town for her to work. You can sort o' lookout her game when I ain't 'round. She'll bring trade, you can gamble, an' her wages'll be fifteen a week, me payin' the fifteen."

"Yuh'll not," Mike Flynn asserted with emphasis. "I've got a fine trade here. I'm puttin' money away, an' for what I dunno. I've no kin in this world, God rest them. You pay half. I'll pay the other half."

"Whadda yuh say to twenty then? A eagle a week apiece."

"Spoke handsome. I knowed you an' me'd hit it off first crack."

"She mustn't ever find out the true insides o' that twenty."

"She'll not. Don't fret. Tongues'll wag when 'tis known Mike Flynn's hired a helper, but I got a tongue too, an' I can use that same or anythin' else nadeful. An' what might be the young lady's name? Joy Blythe! 'Tis a name the good people might 'a' gave her. There's luck in it for shore an' certain."

CHAPTER IV

THE RAINBOW

FOX-TROTTING into town from the south, as Henderson crossed the street to Lainey's Hotel, came a rider on a rangy red horse. Catching sight of Henderson, the rider uttered a shrill whoop and spurred her mount. Henderson wheeled in a flash. The red horse, hard held, slid to a halt at his side. The rider, a young girl, leaned from the saddle and held out a gloveless hand.

"An' how's Mister—" she began.

"Henderson!" whispered the man hurriedly, and vigorously squeezed the proffered fingers.

"Why, of course," laughed the girl. "How stupid of me not to remember. How're tricks?"

She clasped hands on her saddle-horn and surveyed him, a laughing devil in her black eyes.

"Comin' in bunches," he told her, and dropped his left eyelid.

"Naughty, naughty," she laughed, and winked back. "The pitcher will go to the well once too many one of these days."

"Not while I have my health."

"And your assurance. Busy?"

"Some."

"Meaning a lot. —— it. I've been in my uncle's Lazy River camp for a month, and I yearn for conversation other than that of my relatives."

"I tell yuh, Miss Rainbow, if I could whirl the dictionary 'round my head like that I'd be satisfied to talk to myself."

The Rainbow threw him a charming smile in payment and fished in her breast pocket for the makings. She was the half-breed niece of that well-known and greatly respected Indian, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law, and she was a very handsome girl. Her complexion was no darker than that of the average brunette, her figure would have delighted a modiste, and she had spent six years in a convent. The racial stoicism and sullenness, among other attributes, were not present in the Rainbow's make-up. She never acted like a true Indian. In her language she was as unrestrained as in her life. It must not be supposed that she was not a good girl. She was good in all that the adjective implies, as more than one philandering puncher had discovered to his sorrowful surprise and bodily pain.

"Got a match?" she asked.

He pulled one from his hatband. She lit her cigaret and blew a luxurious ring. It speaks well for her beauty that she could blow rings and look attractive without the least difficulty. He watched her admiringly.

"Tell yuh what," he said, struck by an idea; "if yuh wanna talk real bad come over to Lainey's with me. They's a li'l lady there—a stranger, an' she's lonesome an' scared an' needs cheerin' up."

"A girl!" exclaimed the Rainbow ecstatically. "My age?"

"Just about."

"Scared, you said. Of what?" The Rainbow's brows drew together.

"I dunno. Yuh needn't look at me so cross. I didn't scare her."

"Who did?"

"I dunno that neither. She looked scared when she come in the stage yest'day. You go in an' talk to her, will yuh, Miss Rainbow?"

"Will I? Just watch me. Wait till I put Windigo in the corral. No, don't bother. I'll do it myself. Windy'd bite your little ears if you even tried to take off his bridle. Wait for me in front."

Horse and rider whirled and fled in a scurry of pebbles and dust. Henderson went to the hotel. Five minutes later, stammering in his speech, red as to the face, he was presenting the Rainbow to Miss Blythe at the door of the latter's room.

"Shuh-shake hands with my friend, the

Rainbow—Miss—Miss Rainbow, I mean," was the fashion of the introduction, but it sufficed, and Henderson retreated to the outer air and the corral.

He leaned against the bars of the gate and slatted his fingers across his damp forehead.

"——!" he swore. "It ain't no trouble a-tall to talk to one girl by herself, but two together is shore a fright!"

"Yuh look het up," observed a calm voice within a yard of his ear.

Henderson turned and grinned into the face of Chuck Morgan from Soogan Creek.

"It's a hot day," explained Henderson.

"It ain't the heat's makin' yuh sweat," Chuck contradicted shrewdly. "What was yuh mutterin' about? Somebody glom on to yore li'l tin dishes or somethin'?"

"Howdja like nesterin'?" countered Henderson.

"Nester yoreself," cried Mr. Morgan with spirit, screwing down the top of a salve can and sliding the can into a pocket of his chaps. "Me, I got forty cows, four bulls, an' twelve calves. I'm gonna put the Bar S out o' business myself, an' the 88 too if I feel like it. Got a real shore-'nough brand to play with, li'l Willie has. Yessir, any time yuh see a good-lookin' cow, CY left hip, staple fork each ear, don't yuh go fiddlin' with it none 'cause it's mine my own."

"All that?" drawled Henderson, and glanced into the corral behind Chuck to where a raw-boned gray horse with a salve-daubed cut on his shoulder was striving vainly to reach his wound with his teeth. "Where djuh rustle the accordeen, or did yuh find him some'ers livin' with the other coyotes?"

He and Mr. Morgan were friends of long standing, and could insult each other with impunity.

"Ain't he a real hoss?" challenged Chuck. "Don't look nothin' like that yaller lump o' dust a-imitatin' a three-legged table yonder in the corner, does he? Why don'tcha buy you a Injun pony, Bill? Yuh'd be surprised, honest, yuh would."

"Speakin' o' Bill, Chuck," the other said seriously, "I'd take it as a favor if you'd remember the last half o' that name is Henderson."

Chuck nodded.

"I can see," he announced solemnly, "she's gonna be a wild night on the canal, mules pinnin' back their ears an' everythin'. I hope I ain't gonna miss nothin'," he added anxiously.

"Remember yo're a married man," chided Henderson, "an' yore place is the home."

"You talk like a hell-dodger. C'mon back to Soogan with me tonight. You ain't——"

"I AM," interrupted Henderson and continued in a lower tone: "I'm one busy gent. I don't mind tellin' you somethin' for yuh to keep under yore hat. Maybe yuh can help me. Listen. Seven weeks ago Sile Thompson o' the Slash F sent his brother Rufe north to buy horses off o' Scotty Mackenzie up on the Dogsoldier. Rufe never reached the Flyin' M. He stopped in Farewell. He's here yet."

Chuck nodded with half-shut eyes.

"They found him out back o' the stage corrals in the mornin'," he said slowly. "He'd been knifed, an' he was shore carved. Piney Jackson helped bury him, an' he told me."

"Cut more'n once, was he?"

"Y'betcha. His throat was slit half-through, an' his chest looked like it had stopped a Greener's buckshot. But it was all knife-work 'ceptin' his face, an' that had been tramped on. Yessir, Thompson's features had been stomped to a frazzle. Whoever done it shore carried a grudge."

"Which is my idea—now. Sile thought it was just a plain killin' an' robbery. Rufe was carryin' three thousand in bills."

"In a belt?"

"In a belt."

"I didn't hear nothin' about no belt."

"They wasn't none on him when they found him. Jake Rule an' his deputy Kansas was the ones found him, an' they said——"

"Yeah, I know. The sheriff said in a letter when he sent Rufe's horse an' saddle an' war-bags back to the Slash F they wasn't nothin' on Rufe but his gun, six-bits, his silver watch an' Sile Thompson's letter to Scotty. Jake sent back everythin' he found. He was mighty partic'lar about it."

"Piney told me Rufe hadn't pulled his gun," observed Chuck.

"That's what Jake said. Rufe didn't get no even break, that's a cinch. An' a man had oughta have a even break."

"Seen Jake?"

"I ain't gonna see Jake. He ain't got

nothin' to tell me. Yo're the only gent knows why I'm here, an' yo're the only one a-goin' to know—now. Sing Luey's guessed why maybe, but he's all right."

"Sing Luey?"

"Shore, the Chink runnin' the Canton."

"Them foreigners is bad medicine," Chuck said doubtfully.

"I'm tellin' yuh he's all right. Anyway, he can't be helped. He seen me when he was cookin' for the Cross T, an' I guess he knows as much about me as anybody 'round Seymour. Knowin' that, he'd oughta be able to guess the rest."

"Shore ought. Well, here's hopin'. Yuh got you a real two-legged job, Bill."

"I'm due to stay a while. Sile said I wasn't to come back till Rufe was paid for, not if it took years. Have yuh took root in that corral, Chuck, or can you climb over them bars? I know where they's two lonesome drinks just a-pinin' for you an' me."

Chuck Morgan immediately climbed over the gate. Ten minutes later they parted in front of the Starlight Saloon, Chuck to execute his wife's commissions, Henderson to return to his accustomed chair flanking the doorway of the hotel.

From the window of Miss Blythe's room drifted a muffled murmur. Henderson's eye-corners wrinkled with satisfaction.

"The Rainbow shore is good people," he pronounced to himself, and promptly forgot the lady in absorbing deliberation upon his immediate business in life.

Came Chuck Morgan within the hour, and sat down beside him on the door sill.

"When are yuh leavin' town?" queried Chuck.

"Leavin' town?" Henderson raised inquiring brows.

"To save yore life."

"Huh?"

"I hear Tom Stute filled yuh all full o' holes," grinned Chuck.

"I shore feel like a sieve," Henderson smiled back.

"She's a wonder yuh wouldn't tell a man," complained Chuck. "But not you. Anythin' funny yuh got ta keep to yoreself, all same Injun. Some day yo're a-goin' to make me a heap mad actin' thataway. Why didn'tcha down him?"

"I missed. Ragged work, ragged work. Gotta get me a new gun, or somethin'."

"You missed!" scoffed Chuck the unbelieving. "Yo're gettin' foolish. I believe in bein' good-natured—when yo're dealin' with a woman or a pappoose, but they's such a thing as carryin' it too far. Rattlers oughta get their heads blowed off always. It's a rule."

"I expect." Gently.

"When he gets the kinks out of his hand he'll lay for yuh," declared Chuck.

"I'm scared he'll try," admitted Henderson.

"I hate a liar."

"Me too."

CHAPTER V

A MUG-UP AND A GAM

"SHE'S a dear, and I love her." Thus the Rainbow, as she tightened Windigo's front cinch strap.

"That's good hearin'," said Henderson.

"Isn't it?" The Rainbow turned and faced him, competent hands on hips. "Going to be here long?" she asked.

"Maybe—can't tell. I come an' go."

"You certainly are the most unsatisfactory person!" The Rainbow began to blaze, but the flame died almost instantly, and she smiled the smile that ever lurked at the corners of her mouth. "I'm glad you're here," she said.

"Me? Why?"

"You're a handy man to have around."

"Oh, shore. Mother's li'l helper myself. Whatcha want, Miss Rainbow?"

"She told me you were hunting her a job," pursued the Rainbow, heedless of the persiflage. "Did you find one?"

"Y'betcha. At the Blue Pigeon. Didn't have any trouble a-tall."

"As the days flit by, I like you more and more," observed the Rainbow. "Don't blush. This is not an avowal of love. You needn't squirm either. I can't stand a wriggly man. I am merely expressing my entire approval of your conduct, old-timer. If you hadn't been here—but you were, so I'll not go into that. Why didn't you kill him?"

"Stute's shore got lots o' friends. Seems like everybody's askin' me that."

"Naturally. You'll have the job to do again, of course. However—you talk to Joy all you can, old-timer. Keep her from getting lonesome. She likes you. Thinks you're just fine."

"Huh?"

"Don't 'huh' me, you long-legged heron. You heard what I said the first time. You see her a lot and be nice to her, or I'll come back and make you hard to find. And—and don't get drunk more'n once a week. It's bad for the liver. Let me see, did I forget anything." She turned about and regarded her saddlebags and the bulging slicker tied behind the cantle. "Candy and jews-harps for the kids," she rattled on, checking off the articles on her fingers, "and tobacco and matches, all in the slicker.

"Auntie Little Deer's mirror, needles, chewing-gum and butcher knife in the off war-bag together with my two new shirts and half the cartridges. Auntie Two Cloud's thread, beeswax, tin cup, calico and my tooth-brush and the other two bags o' cartridges in the near. The fish-hooks and line in the staple-pocket, and that's the finish. I do hope that mirror rides all right. If it doesn't and it busts it's seven years bad luck for me, and auntie'll have fourteen fits. So long, Mister Henderson. Remember what I've told you. Hold still, Windy. You aren't a pinwheel."

The Rainbow hopped into the saddle and rode off at a lope. She did not look back. Henderson went into the hotel and knocked at Miss Blythe's door. A quick clicking of high heels within, the door opened, and the girl appeared. She smiled at him. There was genuine cheer in that smile. Her dark eyes had lost a deal of their initial sadness.

"About that job," he began abruptly, "I got it. 'Tendin' store. Twenty dollars a week."

"Twenty a week!"

The dark eyes widened saucer-wise.

"Shore, twenty a week. But if yuh don't think that's enough I'll betcha he'd pay more. I'll see him."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" she cried, instantly distressed. "I mean it's a great deal more than I expected. I—I'm not very experienced. I——"

"Don'tcha worry, ma'am. Yuh'll learn—fast. I know yuh will. How about comin' over to the Blue Pigeon—that's the store—an' havin' a talk with Mike Flynn. He's the owner, an' a real gent."

"I'd like to. Will I need a hat? Is it far?"

"Nothin's far in Farewell. It's only when yo're ridin' the range places is far. The Blue Pigeon's right close."

They walked across to the Blue Pigeon. It was their second walk together, but on that first occasion his mental processes had moved too swiftly for him to be fully conscious of her slim slightness. At any distance Miss Blythe's almost perfect proportions made her seem taller than she actually was. But now, with her beside him, he saw that she was barely two finger-breadths taller than five feet. She was wearing high-heeled shoes too. Why, she could walk under his arm. Involuntarily he hunched a shoulder, and promptly felt his face grow hot. Hastily he began to comment upon the state of the weather.

The observant Mr. Simms, holding down a cracker-box in front of Dolan's warehouse permitted himself to smile. He was thinking of his bet with Mr. Stute.

"I guess I win," said Longhorn Simms to himself, and lit a fresh cigar on the strength of it.

Mike Flynn was selling a customer when Henderson and the girl entered. The customer, having paid for and received his purchase, would have lingered. He had a failing for brunettes. But Henderson turned a cold eye in his direction, and he departed.

Mike Flynn did not wait to be introduced.

"So yo're Miss Blythe," he beamed, extending a huge and freckled paw. "I'm Mike Flynn, an' I hope yuh'll like the Blue Pigeon."

The girl put her hand in his, and looked squarely into his honest eyes.

"I know I will," said she.

"An' that's as it should be. Praise be, we'll get along fine. Could yuh be comin' in behind the counter, ma'am?"

He lifted a hinged flap at the end of the counter and beamed anew.

The girl turned to speak to Henderson. But he had gone.

"I didn't even thank him!" she exclaimed. "What will he think of me?"

"What's thanks between friends?" said Mike. "But you'll be seein' him again, don't fret. Thim ropes wit' the overhand knots now. They're for me to lay aloft, but you'll not be usin' thim. I'll build yuh a nate little step-ladder on wheels, so I will."

He seized one of the dangling ropes and went up hand over hand till his head was level with the top shelf. "Here, yuh'll take notice," he continued, holding himself in place with one hand and gesturing with the other, "are the tarps an' the chaps, stuff that goes slow, an' next——"

FROM the Blue Pigeon Henderson went to the corral and caught up his horse. He wanted to ride and think. He realized that his present job was an outlaw in every sense of the word, and that he was riding it bareback. But he was not in the least daunted. He had the happy theory that a murderer, no matter how cleverly painstaking he may be, can not conceal all the evidence of his guilt. There is always a clue or two for the open mind to perceive. Henderson had never yet found cause to dispute this theory.

It was moon-rise when he returned to town and long after the hotel's regular meal-hour. He ate at the Canton, and after supper he looked in at the Starlight saloon, bought two long cigars, and went on to the Blue Pigeon. Mike Flynn was closing for the night, but he bade Henderson enter, and locked the doors and dropped the heavy bar.

"All alone I am, an' lonesome too," said Mike. "I let the little lady go off watch at six, an' told her she naden't work avenin's, nor Sundays nayther. A bit o' sunshine she is, the blessed child, but I'm thinkin' it's April sunshine. There's sorrow at the back o' thim eyes. A cigar? Thanks, an' I will. Come aft for a mug-up an' a gam."

Henderson did not know what a mug-up and a gam might be, but he followed Mike into the back room, a room even more scrupulously neat and clean than the store. From the ceiling a ship's lamp hung in gimbals. Against one wall was a solidly-built bunk covered with a blue blanket. The other furnishings were sea-chests, two chairs, a well-found cupboard and a kitchen stove. Mike Flynn thoughtfully drew the ship's curtains that ran on brass rods above the windows and proceeded to make coffee. A mug-up, it appeared when Henderson expressed a polite curiosity, was coffee in a tin cup, and a gam was a chat.

"'Tis whaler-talk, that last," amplified Mike. "I was harpooner three voyages in the *Gleaner* out o' New Bedford. The sugar's at yore elbow, Mister Henderson."

"My friends call me Bill."

"Mine's Mike," grinned the Irishman. "Here's luck."

"This town's no place for a lady," Henderson said at random over the coffee.

"Yo're right, but the poor innocent says she likes it."

"Yeah? She'll change her mind when some o' these rousy jiggers get to hellin' 'round. Farewell's got a rep."

"Ain't it the truth? A killin' now an' then can't be helped, but I ain't got no use for a murder, not Mike Flynn."

"Seems to me I heard they was a party rubbed out thataway about three months ago."

"I was thinkin' o' that, but 'twas only seven weeks. Rufe Thompson his name was, from south o' Seymour some'ers. As fine-lookin' a young man as yuh'd ever hope to see. Bought smokin' an' plug o' me before he'd been in town twenty minutes. By mornin' he was shark-bait, poor fellah."

"Who killed him?"

"God knows, an' no one else. They was no evidence to be got, though the sheriff an' his deputy wint sniffin' hither an' yon for a wake."

"Maybe some stranger done it," Henderson suggested.

"He was the only stranger in town."

"He might 'a' had a argument with a puncher."

"It was not so rayported. Jake Rule traced his movements, Kansas Casey told me, an' they was few an' seldom. After lavin' here with his tobaccy he put his hoss in the hotel corral. He wint to the Starlight an' had one—two drinks. He done the same in the Happy Heart. He ate supper at the Canton. He wint back to the Happy Heart an' played black-jack an' the wheel maybe a couple o' hours. He quit sixteen dollars loser, an' put in the rest o' the time till maybe one o'clock in the mornin' in the dance-hall.

"He told the barkeep over his last drink, at one o'clock or thereabouts like I'm tellin' yuh, he was goin' to the hotel an' turn in. He left the Dewdrop, but he didn't reach the hotel. For all Jake could find out nobody laid eyes on him after he left the dance-hall till Jake himself an' Kansas found him stark dead wit' his gun not pulled out back o' the stage corral in the mornin'."

"Maybe he was drunk, this Rufe Thompson, an'——"

"Not him. He only had two drinks at the dance-hall, an' four maybe before supper. Six drinks all told stretched through eight hours. An' they was short drinks—none of 'em more'n two fingers. 'Twould make no man drunk, such wouldn't."

"Well, on a rainy night like that most anythin' could happen an' not be found out."

"'Twas not a rainy night. 'Twas a fine night wit' a full moon, I mind that special. 'Twas over the mast at midnight, the moon was, for I wint to bed then, an' I seen it."

"'S funny how with moonlight an' all he didn't see what was comin' an' go after his gun. The ground's open back o' them corrals. No place for a murderer to hide."

"It's all beyond me, but it's a —— shame, I know that. Some more coffee, Bill?"

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF THE WICKED

MR. HENDERSON elected to leave Mike Flynn's quarters by the back way. He stood in the soft darkness of the Blue Pigeon's shadow, his eyes on the moon-drenched Happy Heart corral, and considered. He had pumped Mike Flynn fairly dry. There was another he wished to pump—the placid Celestial, Sing Luey. "Wished" is used advisedly, for the average Chinaman can not be pumped, and Sing Luey was above the average. He would talk or not, as the spirit moved him.

In the Happy Heart corral a horse neighed shrilly. From the house next door came the rising wail of a wakeful baby. A dog at the other end of Main Street took exception to the moon and began to bark. A coyote in the distance yapped steadily. A voice at Henderson's side said—

"Good evening."

Henderson's nerves were under excellent control, but he almost jumped. He wheeled and confronted Sing Luey.

"Why the gun?" questioned Sing Luey in a tone of gentle reproof.

Henderson returned the weapon to the waistband of his trousers and smiled crookedly. His action had been natural—for him.

"Don't be so —— quiet next time," he whispered. "Y'oughto know better. Whadda yuh want?"

"What do you want?" was the quiet reply.

"Me?" Henderson's eyes searched the serene features.

"Of course. Who else? I knew you would wish to see me again, and I have been sitting under Kennedy's wagon waiting for you to come out. I have waited two hours."

Henderson glanced at Kennedy's wagon standing some thirty yards to the left.

"Howdja know I'd come out the back way?" he demanded.

"Simple logic. Mike always bars and locks his front door. You and he were in the back room. Naturally you would leave by the back door."

"You must 'a' been keepin' cases on me mighty close," Henderson said crossly.

"I knew you wished to see me. It may be that I wished to see you."

"Le's go where we can talk." Abruptly.

"My house is at your disposal," suggested Sing Luey suavely.

Together, the white man and the yellow, they catfooted through the shadows to the rear of the Canton. Henderson was more than a thought uncomfortable. Hell's bells, the Chink was a mind-reader.

Sing Luey turned the wooden knob of the Canton's back door. The door swung on its hinges without a sound.

"Wait," said Sing Luey. "I will make a light."

Henderson heard him padding about inside. A match scratched and flared. Sing Luey lit a lamp and beckoned. Henderson obeyed and closed the door behind him. He was in the kitchen of the Canton. In a room at the right some one was snoring.

"My cook sleeps with enjoyment," observed Sing Luey, and led the way through a narrow passage to a closed door. He unlocked this door, thrust it open, and entered the room beyond. Henderson followed. Sing Luey set the lamp on a table, turned the key in the door-lock, and dropped a heavy piece of tapestry across the door.

Henderson's eyes ranged the room. His nostrils sniffed the incense-laden air. The bronze Buddha on its jade stand, the tiny altar where joss-sticks glowed, intrigued him. The gorgeous China silk hangings concealing the walls and windows, the ancient leather-bound books that heaped one-half the table, filled him with wonder. He had never seen such things before.

And Sing Luey had once cooked for the Cross T! He looked at Sing Luey. The Chinaman smiled his balmy smile and indicated the chair beside the table with a swing of his hand.

"Be pleased to sit," invited Sing Luey. "I will lie upon the bed."

The Chinaman waited with meticulous politeness till his guest was seated, then dropped his long body sidewise upon the narrow bed beyond the Buddha and supported his head on one hand.

"Kong-Fu-Tse writes," said he, pronouncing the eminent philosopher's name in the Chinese fashion, "that nothing is hidden. What the eye does not perceive, the mind may fathom. That is logic."

Henderson tilted his hat and rubbed an ear.

"I dunno yore friend—" he began haltingly.

"He has been dead more than two thousand years."

"Yeah? Well, anyway, he knowed what he was talkin' about. Some o' them old-timers was right wise. I wonder now was Kung—Kung-Foo-Soo—alive this minute what he'd say about a murder that happened here in Farewell about seven weeks ago."

"He would take thought certainly," admitted Sing Luey inscrutably.

"He'd have to have somethin' to go on."

"He would discover that something."

"There ain't no evidence, so far as I can find out, that anybody seen Rufe Thompson—might as well be open with yuh, I expect—from the time he left the dance-hall till Jake Rule found him in the mornin'."

"It was bright moonlight that night," observed Sing Luey.

Henderson nodded. He no longer felt uncomfortable in the presence of Sing Luey. A warm liking for the Chinaman grew apace.

"It should have been an easy matter," went on Sing Luey, "to watch the movements of Mister Thompson—had any one taken the trouble."

"No one did."

"I did."

Henderson received the declaration coolly.

"You would," he remarked. "Tell it."

"Mister Thompson ate supper here that night. During the meal he told Piney Jackson he was going to the Flying M to buy horses. I heard him, so did ten other men. Mister Thompson was an indiscreet young man. While he ate his left hand strayed frequently to his side below the ribs. Where does a man wear a money-belt?"

"I see," Henderson nodded grimly.

"What you see, I saw. What I saw, other men saw. It was too easy. The traveling north to buy horses, the left hand feeling for the safety of the unaccustomed belt. What more could a man ask?"

"Yuh saw him leave the dance-hall?" prompted Henderson.

"I did, but that was pure chance. I was sitting on my door sill in the moonlight when I saw a woman appear in the narrow way between the stage station and Carlson's stable. The moon was almost directly overhead, but the eaves of the stable threw a shadow, and the opening was in darkness. Nevertheless I saw her white face as she peered out past the corner of the stable in the direction of the dance-hall. Her manner was secret, furtive, and consequently I observed her more closely than I would otherwise have done.

"A moment later Mister Thompson came out of the dance-hall and started to walk toward the hotel. The woman drew back deeper into the shadow. I watched. Mister Thompson would have to pass the narrow opening where the woman stood. As he passed he stopped. She must have called him, but I could not hear. He turned aside into the opening and disappeared. That is the last I saw of him."

"If yuh could have warned him!" burst out Henderson.

"Primarily, it was not my business. Secondly, how could I know what was to occur? Thirdly, can a Chinaman warn a white man?" Thus Sing Luey without rancor.

"I jumped too sudden," acknowledged Henderson. "Yo're right an' I'm wrong. Y' ain't said nothin' to anybody else about that woman, have yuh?"

"Hardly. Accidents, especially accidents to Chinamen, occur much too easily in this country. I prefer a quiet life."

Henderson stretched out his long legs and crossed one ankle over the other.

"Howdja know I won't say who told me when I get through?" he asked.

"I know Mister Henderson."

"Yo're takin' a chance, at that. Have yuh got any idea who that woman was?"

"Not the slightest," declared Sing Luey. "There are fifteen women in Farewell," he added helpfully.

"How many married?"

"Ten—with families, each and every one."

"That leaves five—five. Ain't they five girls in the dance-hall?"

"Exactly."

"One o' them, huh?"

"I don't know."

"Yuh dunno, but yuh can guess faster than a hoss can trot. An' so can I."

"I am glad of that," felicitated Sing Luey.

"Who was the ten men eatin' here same time as Rufe?"

"'Sandy' Bacon, Piney Jackson, Ben Skeel, Kansas Casey, Dolan, 'Shorty' Vang, Lamp Black, Torney, 'Eagle River' Pete and Bill Chase."

"Would yore pardner, Kung-Foo-Soo, trail all o' them jiggers?"

"Knowing them as I do, he would eliminate four to begin with."

"What four?"

"Sandy Bacon, Piney Jackson, Kansas Casey and Dolan."

"Why them?"

"Slow-thinking and honest, all of them."

"That leaves Ben Skeel, Lamp Black, Shorty Vang an' Torney, Eagle River Pete an' Bill Chase. I know Ben Skeel, Shorty Vang an' Torney are Longhorn Simms' dealers, an' Lamp Black's his look-out. Whadda the other two do for a livin'?"

"Eagle River Pete is the stage-station hostler. Bill Chase works for Dolan."

"Any reason for suspectin' the tinhorns?"

"None—except the nature of their calling."

"How about Eagle River an' Bill Chase?"

"They are friendly with the other four."

Henderson smiled sunnily.

"I knowed I had a reg'lar job," he observed. "But I got somethin' to go on—now. Have any o' them six gents yuh speak of left town lately?"

"Not since the murder—that I know of."

"Guess yuh'd know it if they had. Tell me somethin'. Why yuh doin' all this?"

"Doing what?" asked Sing Luey.

"Readin' sign for me thisaway."

Sing Luey's blank face became blanker. He stared stonily at Henderson.

"I have answered a great many questions," he observed softly.

"All right," said Henderson. "Yuh've shore acted the part of a real gent, an' I don't give a —— for yore reasons. I'm obliged—again. Seems like I'll be owin' yuh a heap before I'm through."

"You will owe me nothing when you are through."

The slanting eyes of Sing Luey glittered opal-black in the lamplight. Or was it the lamplight? Once, on a street in San Francisco, Henderson had been an unwilling spectator of a fight between two tongs. The eyes of those Chinese gunmen had glittered in precisely the same way. Henderson would have given a great deal to read the mind of Sing Luey.

He stood up and pulled down the brim of his hat.

"Guess I'll be movin' along," he announced.

THIS walk to the hotel was not uneventful. As he was passing the Starlight Saloon a Winchester in the neighborhood of Jackson's blacksmith's shop cracked viciously, and a bullet grazed his left ear. Henderson's sidewise leap into the grateful shelter of the Starlight's pile of empty whisky-kegs would have done credit to a bronco. Hot and wrathful, for the ear tingled, he crouched behind his breastwork, swept off his hat, and peered between two slanting empties.

Jackson's blacksmith shop, in common with every other building in Farewell, lay silent under the moon. Of the enterprising bushwhacker there was no visible sign. Henderson eased back on his heels, laid his useless six-shooter across his knee, and tenderly fingered the smarting ear.

"Serves me —— good an' right," he told himself. "I'd oughta knowed better'n to come friskin' along so free an' careless on a moonlight night. Wonder is it Stute. I ain't really had time to gather many more friends—yet."

He laughed silently, his eyes on the blacksmith shop. Behind him the door of the Starlight opened suddenly. Henderson looked over his shoulder. The tousled and sockless bartender stood in the doorway.

"Who'n —— fired that shot?" demanded the bartender. "It come right through the door and busted——"

"*Bang!* The flash of the gun winked at the corner of the blacksmith shop, and the bullet scored a whisky-keg above Henderson's head and splintered its way through a window-frame. Henderson fired twice at the flash.

The door had slammed shut as the glass fell tinkling. From within came the muffled voice of the bartender.

"Say, for Gawd's sake go some'ers else, will yuh?" he implored. "Them bullets come right through."

"I like yore nerve!" cried Henderson indignantly. "You go hide under the bar if yo're scared."

"I'm there now. But I ain't scared. It's where I sleep—under the bar."

"Aw right. Go to sleep an' be ——."

"How can I sleep with you chunkers hellin' 'round thisaway?" complained the bartender. "If yuh gotta go pickin' feuds why don'tcha pick 'em out on the range?"

"I ain't pickin' no feuds," denied Henderson. "I'm peaceable as all hell myself. He's doin' the pickin'. Guess he must 'a' thought you was me when he fired that last time. Step out in the doorway once an' we'll fool him again."

"You hold yore breath till I do!" snarled the peevish bartender.

Henderson grinned and tipped over an empty. Instantly the enemy Winchester cracked and drilled the keg.

"Gettin' nervous," decided Henderson. "He'll shoot at anythin' that moves. Me, I'm goin' away from here. Can't do nothin' with a six-gun at this range."

Lying flat he wriggled backward along the sidewalk to the corner of the saloon. He rolled 'round the corner, scrambled to his feet, and ran as rapidly as his high heels permitted to a point of vantage opposite the blacksmith shop. Which point was a straggly growth of bushes reaching out tonguewise from the flank of the hotel corral.

Henderson lay on his stomach among the bushes and scanned the place of ambush with hopeful eyes. But the prospect was blatantly peaceful, and apparently empty of all life. Henderson remained where he was for fully thirty minutes. The wait was barren of results.

"Roll in, feller," he told himself, and hitched his crawling way back to the corral.

He circled the corral on his feet, and entered the hotel through a kitchen window.

"Anyhow, that quick-shootin' sport didn't see me go into Sing Luey's, or he'd 'a' bushwhacked me when I come out," was his pleased judgment as he sat down on his cot and pulled off his boots. "An' that's one good thing y'betcha."

CHAPTER VII

DECEITFULLY SPEAKING

HENDERSON was up at dawn. He never cockered himself in the matter of sleep when business was to the fore. He couldn't afford to. Letting himself quietly out of the hotel, he angled across the street to the blacksmith shop and narrowly inspected the place whence had come the lawless bullets of the night.

In the light of day that side and corner of the blacksmith shop wore an aspect of honest trade. Several wagon wheels littered the ground. A broken vise cuddled a billet of wood. A rusty log chain looped its links across the vise. Certainly there were no spent shells to be found though Henderson got down on his knees and pawed the dusty earth about like any terrier.

Sounded then steps upon the sidewalk. Henderson did not desist from his labors. A man sauntered past the shop and halted at sight of Henderson. The latter looked up into the face of the marshal.

"Lost anythin'?" queried the marshal.

"My diamond tarara," was the reply, delivered in a tone of the deepest concern. "I wouldn't 'a' lost it for two hosses an' a new wagon. It must 'a' fell off when I was comin' home from the dance. Never did fit like it should, that tarara didn't. Y'aint seen it, have yuh?"

"Tarara!" repeated the mystified marshal. "Dance! What dance? They wasn't no dance in town last night. You mean the dance-hall?"

"Who lives next door?" Henderson changed the subject drawlingly.

"Nobody. She's Piney's shack where he mows away wagon tongues, reaches, neckyokes an' similar. What——"

"I was just wonderin', thassall," cut in Henderson. "I seen she was locked on the outside, o' course. But I always like to know for shore. It helps, Marshal. It all helps."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" frowned the marshal. "Diamond tararas, dances, an' now, 'It helps.' What helps what, huh? That's what I wanta know."

"Seein's it's you, I'll tell yuh. I'm comin' home to the hotel in the mornin' so early when a gent right here where I'm squattin' now cuts down on me with a Winchester an' misses puttin' my light out by less'n a inch. Yuh'll notice my left ear is sort o' burnt on top. Which ain't all he done neither. The Starlight's shy some glass, the barkeep's lost a year's growth, an' the pile o' empties out front is drilled a-plenty. Such goin's-on ain't right a li'l bit. Me, I want that night-raidin' party arrested. Yessir, I want him in the calaboose where he belongs."

"I did hear some shootin' last night," admitted the marshal. "But I thought it was only some o' the boys feelin' good. An' you was shot at?"

"Ain't I been tellin' yuh? Want me to put it in writin', huh? Now you hop out an' arrest him like I say, Marshal."

"Who is he? Tell me who he is, an' I'll glom on to him fast enough."

"How'd I know who is he? I'm askin' you. Yo're the marshal. You'd oughta know. She's yore job. Fly at it. When you grab him, lemme know, an' I'll tell yuh what to do next."

Henderson stood up, dusted his knees, grinned cheerfully at the marshal and walked away.

The marshal, with a flushed face, watched him go. He was warmly aware that he had been made game of. But he did not feel quite up to the task of resenting it—not with Henderson. The latter was too utterly careless of consequences. It was a pleasant world. Why seek to leave it? Thus, in his uncultured way, reasoned the marshal and went home to breakfast.

From the blacksmith shop Henderson went to the Starlight Saloon. The red-eyed bartender was yawningly mopping up in preparation for the daily tide of customers.

"Curryin' the floor thisaway is one —— fool trick," said the bartender without raising his eyes, at Henderson's entrance. "But the boss says she's gotta be did. ——, they aint no sense in bein' so pernickety. She only gets dirty again. I—oh, it's you, is it? He didn't get yuh, did he?" he added in a tone of disappointment.

"Don't be so —— sorry," adjured Henderson. "Where'd them bullets go?"

"Through the window."

"I know that. Where'd they hit?"

"On the wall yonder."

Henderson strode to the indicated wall. He found the bullet-holes without difficulty. They were some ten feet apart and bored at an angle. He produced a clasp-knife and dug into the wood.

"Hey, don't do that!" remonstrated the bartender. "Yo're spoilin' the planks."

"Which yo're the most contrary gent I ever see," pronounced Henderson, not ceasing to labor. "Yo're always wantin' a feller to stop what he's doin'. She's a bad habit. Yuh'd oughta get over it. I gotta have these bullets. I gotta. They's no two ways about it. I'm makin' a collection of all the lead comin' my way no matter where she hits. Why, feller, s'pose them bullets had landed in you. I'd have to be diggin' 'em out o' yore carcass. Think o' that, an' shut up."

Henderson's tone toward the end of his speech, became sinister. The bartender quieted and went sulkily on with his work.

Henderson scooped out the bullets without difficulty and examined them closely. He dropped them into a pocket of his vest and rang down a silver dollar on the bar.

"They's a wheel for the damage," he told the bartender, and marched out.

Returning to the hotel he went in to breakfast. Of the few guests all were present save Miss Blythe. Henderson, despite a late start was the first to finish. As he left the dining-room he heard Miss Blythe's door open. But he did not turn his head.

Mr. Henderson, anxious to disseminate a little misleading information, sauntered down to the Happy Heart. A modest one-fingered drink in the heel of his hand, he addressed the bartender.

"Dunno where I can pick up a few horses an' maybe some mules, do yuh?" asked Henderson, conscious that Longhorn Simms was standing in the doorway of the back room where he ran his games.

"No, I don't," replied the bartender. "Some o' the outfits 'round here might have a few hosses to sell. But mules is hard to get. When a gent has any he mostly figures on keepin' 'em."

"That's shore tough," mourned Henderson. "I was countin' on a few mules. I guess now I'll have to do some ridin'. How's chances for cattle? Just a small jag?"

"Aimin' to start a ranch?" the bartender asked quickly.

"I might," was the cautious reply. "An' then again I mightn't. I might be buyin' 'em for somebody else. Yuh can't tell."

He stared fixedly into the bartender's eyes. The man's gaze wavered, dropped.

He swabbed off the bar with sudden industry. Henderson drank off his liquor and departed.

HE STOPPED at the Blue Pigeon and found Miss Blythe taking stock. She laid her list on the counter, weighted it with her pencil, and smiled upon him frankly.

"I wanted to see you as soon as I could," she said, "but you'd gone when I went to breakfast. I haven't thanked you for—for everything. I am——"

"Now thassallright," hastily interrupted Henderson. "Yo're lettin' me do it is thanks enough, ma'am. So don't you go thinkin' about it no more. Just forget it."

"I shan't and I won't. Don't you suppose I know why you were shot at last night? It was because you befriended me. You're running risks on my account."

She stopped, her dark eyes shining, her lower lip caught between her teeth.

"Who told yuh I was shot at?" he demanded almost roughly.

"No one. I heard the marshal telling Mister Flynn. Why, the top of your ear's black with dried blood! You've been wounded, and you never told me! You stay right here till I get some hot water and bathe it and bandage it."

"Ma'am, yuh musn't—I can't!" protested Henderson, terrified lest a customer enter and find him being tended. "My ear's fine. Only a scratch. Don't hurt a-tall. She's healin' awready. Don'tcha bother. I can't wait. I got business. Ma'am, please!"

It was the piteous entreaty that the girl could not resist. She paused with her hand on the canvas curtain of the doorway leading to the rear room.

"Come back, an' sell me some neat's-foot," he begged. "I wanna oil my saddle."

"You're sure it's all right?" she said earnestly, returning slowly. "Doesn't it hurt a little?"

"Not one li'l li'l," he assured her.

"But I don't like it. You get hurt and won't let me help you. You might have been killed."

"I wasn't, an' I come mighty nigh downin' the other gent. Don'tcha fret. Next time I'll rub him out shore."

Miss Blythe went white as the flour sacks on the shelf behind her.

"For heaven's sake, be careful!" she cried. "If anything should happen to you because of me I'd never forgive myself—never!"

"Somebody's comin'," warned Henderson. "Better get me that neat's-foot."

Piney Jackson, entering in quest of matches, found Henderson sedately paying a pale-cheeked girl for a can of neat's-foot oil. Henderson left at once with his oil. Piney, asking for matches, was presented with a plug of chewing.

"I asked for matches, ma'am," said the blacksmith.

"I beg your pardon," murmured Miss Blythe. "I'm a little—I don't know the stock very well yet."

" 'Tsall right, ma'am. They're on the left there, second shelf."

Henderson picked up his saddle and bridle from where they lay under a window in the hotel dining-room and carried them out to the corral. He dropped the saddle across a convenient log, straddled the log, and proceeded to oil the leather with care and a soft rag.

He had finished the saddle and was starting in on the bridle when Longhorn Simms strolled 'round the corner of the hotel and advanced upon him. Mr. Simms' intentions were apparently pacific. He was smoking a long cigar. His thumbs were hooked in the armholes of his vest. The black eyes flanking the broken nose twinkled amiably.

"Howdy," was the gambler's greeting.

"Tol'rable, tol'rable," said Henderson, regarding him gravely. "How's yore health?"

"I'm able to eat," replied Longhorn Simms, standing with legs spread wide. "I've seen yuh in the Happy Heart. My name's Simms."

"I heard it was," said the noncommittal Henderson.

"Yeah," persisted Mr. Simms, not in the least dashed by the other's manner. "I hear yo're in the market for hosses, mules an' cattle."

"Yuh must 'a' heard me talkin' to the bartender."

Henderson rubbed his oily rag across the crownpiece.

"I did," confessed Mr. Simms. "An' I know where yuh can get some hosses, mules too."

"That's good hearin'. Where?"

"The 88 ranch."

"The 88 ranch?"

"Yeah, the manager has more hosses than he wants, an' six Texas mules he's aimin' to sell."

"When'd he tell yuh?"

"He didn't tell me. I heard a couple o' his boys talkin' at the bar."

"When?" Henderson drawled the question, his attention obviously centered on a stiff curbstrap.

"Oh, last week sometime. I disremember exactly."

This was interesting. Mr. Simms had been in receipt of the news when he stood in the doorway of the Happy Heart's back room, listening to Henderson asking questions of the bartender. Yet Mr. Simms had kept back his information. Henderson wondered whether Mr. Simms had had speech with Mr. Stute in the interval. Henderson thoroughly oiled a check-piece.

"If yo're thinkin' o' ridin' out to the 88," Mr. Simms continued, "I guess I'll trail along with yuh. I got business there, too."

"I didn't say I had business there," said Henderson.

"But them hosses an' mules—you said——"

"But maybe I wouldn't wanna go to the 88 right now. Maybe now I'd rather try the Cross-in-a-box, or somethin'."

"What's the use o' wastin' time on them other ranches when I know the 88 has hosses an' mules for sale?"

"Yo're shore advisin' me for my own good," admitted Henderson. "Yessir, it's right neighborly of yuh, Mister Simms. Guess I'll drift out there tomorrow."

"I'll go with yuh, if yuh ain't got no objections. When——"

"You didn't gimme time to say whether I had objections," complained Henderson.

"Have yuh?" Mr. Simms managed a smile.

"I ain't. Not one li'l objection. Yo're as welcome as a cool breeze. Be here at four o'clock in the mornin'. I'll be waitin'."

"That's pretty early," objected Mr. Simms, thinking of his nightly labors.

"You don't have to come. Guess I could struggle along without yuh."

"I'll be here," Mr. Simms declared shortly. "So long."

Henderson smiled happily at his saddle as Mr. Simms walked away.

"Guess I must 'a' riled him," was his thought. "Some get riled most awful easy, an' some—don't. Him an' me's due to have one real salubrious ride—not."

HE TOOK from his vest pocket the two pieces of lead he had dug from the wall of the Starlight. He already knew that their caliber was .45-90, a caliber common to many rifles in the Territory. He shook the bullets dice-fashion in the palm of his hand and swore mildly.

"If I was a real detective," he reflected. "these here li'l babies would tell me a whole lot. Yessir, one look at 'em, en' I'd know the kind of a gent who fired 'em, the color of his whiskers, where he lives when he's home an' the names o' his pa an' ma. I wonder what'n —— I dug 'em out for?"

He flipped the bullets into the tongue of brush beyond the corral and stooped to retrieve his fallen rag. But his eyes idly followed the bullets in their flight, and he did not immediately straighten. For he marked a curious stir among the bushes at the spot where the lead fell—a slight commotion that could not by any means be directly attributed to the bullets.

Henderson sat upright, laid the rag tidily across the top of the can, and stretched luxuriously. Then he arose and walked slowly 'round to the opposite side of the corral. Once past the corner, he removed his spurs and quickened his pace.

Sixty seconds later, walking softly on the balls of his feet, he was approaching the tongue of bushes from the rear. He stopped at the edge, craned his neck, and peered into the brush. There, on the farther side, like a jack-rabbit in its form, a man lay on his stomach. By the turn of his head he seemed to be watching the gate of the corral and the log on which Henderson's saddle trailed its stirrups.

"I ain't there no more," Henderson observed in a conventional tone.

The man humped himself at the hips and scrambled to his frightened feet. He faced Henderson trembling, his mouth opening and closing spasmodically, his eyelids batting frantically. He was the dance-hall roustabout, a poor creature men in their humor had christened "Snakebite," for he was subject to epilepsy.

"Who set you here to watch me?" Henderson asked gently.

Snakebite shook in his not-too-clean

clothing till he resembled a scarecrow in a gale, and gobbled unintelligibly.

"Who did?" persisted Henderson.

"He'll kuk-kill me!" the wretched Snakebite wailed mournfully.

"Yuh needn't squeal," said Henderson, "Geddown quick before somebody sees yuh."

Snakebite dropped instantly. Henderson squatted on his heels.

"Tom Stute told yuh to come here an' watch me, didn't he?" Henderson pursued inexorably.

Snakebite stared with terror-stricken, bleary eyes.

"Didn't he?" persisted the former.

Snakebite nodded forlornly.

"I thought so."

"He'll kuk-kill me," repeated the unhappy pilgarlic, his mind refusing to be diverted from that cardinal issue.

"I expect—if he knows it," observed Henderson grimly. "But he needn't know it, unless you tell him. I won't tell him, y'betcha."

The blear-eyes grew less wobegone.

"See," went on Henderson, "I ain't tellin' nothin', an' don't you. Here's a dollar."

Snakebite's talons clutched the piece of silver. He pouched it swiftly in the one good pocket of his tattered trousers. Dollars were few and far between with the Dewdrop roustabout.

"What'd he tell yuh to do?" asked Henderson.

"He told me to watch when yuh got yore hoss an' see which way yuh went," said Snake-bite, becoming calmer with every breath he drew.

"Goin' to watch all day?"

"All night, if I had to," he said.

"He shore works his help, that feller. Here's the makin's an' matches, Snakebite. Just you lay an' smoke an' watch like a good jigger, an' when yuh go back yuh can tell yore boss I ain't caught up my hoss none. An' remember he'll shore hang yore hide on the fence if he finds out I caught yuh here."

"I'll remember," Snakebite nodded gratefully.

"Where'd them bullets hit yuh?" asked Henderson.

"What-what bull—oh, them! Was them bullets? I thought they was rocks. Hit me on top of the head, so they did, —— hard. I near jumped up."

"I guess that must 'a' been whyfor I dug 'em out," Henderson grinned.

"Dug 'em out?"

"Nothin' you'd understand, Snakebite. So long."

Henderson raised a cautious head and, seeing no one, stood up and unhurriedly retraced his steps to the saddle and the oil.

"He ain't leavin' nothin' to chance, that Stute gent," he said to himself as he sat down on the log and picked up his bridle. "I wonder now does he think I'm aimin' to give that tinhorn Simms the slip. I'm shore wonderin' a whole lot."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEWDROP

"THOUGHT you'd gone home." Henderson gazed at Chuck Morgan in mild surprise.

"I did," said Chuck, dismounting springily. "But I forgot somethin'. I come back for it."

"Yore memory is shore a fright, but you didn't forget nothin'. You come back lookin' for trouble, that's what yuh come back for. Ain'tcha got no sense a-tall? Yo're married an' yuh'd oughta——"

"Aw, shut up about me bein' married, will yuh? I know I'm married, an' I'm ——glad of it, but it don't prevent me wantin' to frisk 'round he-fashion, do it? You gimme a pain! Yuh talk like I wasn't human, or somethin'. Ain't this a free country? Ain't I got my growth?"

"Yo're a —— fool," Henderson said affectionately. "All the same yuh'd oughta stayed away. Yore wife——"

"She said if I didn't come I wasn't her husband, so there y'are. Yuh needn't go to jumpin' sideways. I only told her you was in Farewell 'n' a side-kicker would come in handy. Jane ain't forgot that fracas over south o' Injun Ridge, even if you have."

Chuck's allusion concerned an incident of the trail wherein Morgan, beset by several gentlemen bent upon his assassination, had been rescued by Henderson.

"Aw ——," Henderson said helplessly and let it go at that.

"What do we do now?" queried the energetic Mr. Morgan.

"Nothin'—now. Tonight I sort o' figured on lookin' in at the dance-hall."

"Now yo're whistlin' a tune! Maybe Tom Stute's hand'll be all right again. Maybe he'll want action, him an' his friends. An' you was a-goin' to swing an' rattle with that crowd on yore high lonesome! Well, all I gotta say——"

"Don't say it. Let's go over to the blacksmith shop an' pitch hoss-shoes. Two-bits a game. C'mon."

By five o'clock Chuck was seven games ahead. Piney Jackson, having successfully set a stubborn tire, called it a day, and wanted in.

"Hop to it," said Henderson. "Take my place. I gotta go buy me the makin's. An' I shore hope yuh beat this wall-eyed pirate. He's all swelled up like a poisoned pup right now with a dollar six-bits o' my money in his pants pocket. Take it away from him."

Henderson hitched up his trousers and walked along the street to the Blue Pigeon. He found Mrs. Rule and Mrs. Jackson buying groceries. The former lady was bewailing the fact that the store was out of her pet brands of canned corn and baking-powder.

"An' I was aimin' to have succotash an' biscuits tonight for Jake," grumbled Mrs. Rule. "I want him to send East for a melojum, an' he'll do anythin' for me when he's full of succotash an' biscuits."

"Ain't it the truth?" chimed in Mrs. Jackson. "Give a man what he wants to eat an' he'll say 'yes' to anythin'. Not but what Piney ain't a easy man to do for an' a good provider," she added hastily, unwilling that her hearers should for one moment doubt that her husband possessed all mortal virtues. "But grub shore does count, an' that's a fact. You wait till yo're married, honey, an' you'll see."

This last was to Miss Blythe's address. She promptly blushed red as any artillery guidon.

"I'll—I'll never get married," she stammered.

"Don't think it," said Mrs. Rule. "You won't have no trouble, not with them eyes an' hair. But don't you be in no hurry. Take yore time an' look 'round a-plenty. They's lots o' men in this world, but they's only one husband. Be sure he's steady an' saves his money, an' ——"

Henderson withdrew to the street and kicked restless heels against an empty box till Mrs. Rule and Mrs. Jackson, arm-laden and chattering endlessly, departed homeward.

At Henderson's entry Miss Blythe looked up from the ledger in which she was adding a column of figures and smiled her winsome smile at him. Her cheeks were still becomingly flushed.

"How yuh gettin' along?" he asked, his grin answering the smile.

"Mister Flynn says I'm learning very quickly. I like it here lots. Mister Flynn is awfully kind and patient with me. How is your ear?"

She eyed with concern the organ in question.

"Fine. He would be. He's one white gent, he is. I was just wonderin', ma'am, if—if yuh'd like—if some Sunday now—if I get yuh a gentle cayuse—can yuh ride, ma'am?"

"Why, yes, I can ride," replied she.

"Then that's all right. Will yuh go ridin' with me some Sunday?" The words at last came out with a rush.

He stood at gaze, perspiring slightly.

"I'd just love to go," was the heartening answer.

"I'll fix it up soon's I can," he told her.

Jingle, *rattle*, *thud*, and *clink* in dusty Main Street. The stage from the south was rolling in. At the sound the girl's face blanched. The pupils of the dark eyes dilated. She caught her breath sharply.

"I wonder where I left my handkerchief?" she said in a low tone, and walked to the front of the store, and made a show of searching the shelves near the window.

Henderson did not fail to perceive that, while her hands poked about among cans of tomatoes and peas, her eyes strayed ever toward the street and the halted stage.

Henderson slid backward till he too could look out of the window at the stage. One by one the passengers alighted. They were five in number—four obvious punchers and a salesman lugging his sample-case. The girl came back, her fingers drumming on the counter. The noiseless Mr. Henderson had apparently not moved from his place near the ledger.

"I guess I must have lost it," she said carelessly.

"It's stickin' out over yore belt," Henderson informed her.

"So it is."

She pulled out the handkerchief and tucked it in place again.

"Guess I'll take a couple o' sacks o' tobacco an' some papers," said Henderson.

He went away with his purchase, fingers rolling a preoccupied cigaret.

"When the stage come in she got scared," he reflected. "When she come back from the window after seein' who got off she wasn't. She thinks somebody's a-trailin' her, that's a cinch. When he, she, or it drifts in I shore gotta be in Farewell free an' adjacent, y'betcha."

IN THE cool of the evening Mr. Henderson and Mr. Morgan visited the dance-hall. Under the flaring lamps, to the tucker and lilt of "Soldier's Joy," a sweating cowboy was dancing a jig, and dancing it well. The Dewdrop's denizens and the customers lined wall and bar and cheered the puncher on. Mr. Stute and Mr. Bill Chase, the former with his right arm in an ostentatious sling, stood beside the fiddler's table. The entrance of Mr. Henderson and his friend passed unnoticed for a space.

When the bartender became mindful of his duties, Mr. Henderson was leaning against the end of the bar near the door, and Mr. Morgan stood across the room, his attention obviously centered on the hard-working dancer.

The bartender approached Mr. Henderson and looked at him with unfriendly eyes.

"Whisky," Mr. Henderson said briefly.

The bartender filled the order, collected and withdrew to the far end of the bar. He caught the eye of his employer, grinned one-sidedly and jerked his head backward. Mr. Stute glanced along the bar and moved closer to Mr. Chase in order to obtain a better view. Mr. Chase looked up, saw Henderson, and instantly assumed the unconscious expression of a wooden Indian. Not so Mr. Stute. He reddened with anger and walked with stiff, quick strides to Mr. Henderson. And as he walked the fiddling ceased, the cowboy stopped in the middle of a step, and men and women, nudging one another, turned their eyes upon that tall, lean citizen standing at the end of the bar.

"My arm has not yet entirely recovered," stated Mr. Stute, facing Henderson at the distance of a yard.

"That's shore tough," commiserated Mr. Henderson. "But I ain't yore doctor."

Mr. Stute was pleased to ignore the flippancy. He glared into the eyes of Mr. Henderson. But the latter had stared into the eyes of grimmer, harder men than Mr. Stute. The washed-out gray gaze held steady. The spirit behind the black eyes struggled all it knew, but it did not know enough. Mr. Stute's eyes flickered, dropped and fastened themselves on Mr. Henderson's top shirt-button.

"When my hand's well," Mr. Stute began thickly.

"You'll be able to go ridin'," supplied Mr. Henderson.

"I warn you I'll shoot on sight."

"Thanks for the warnin'. I didn't need it. All I gotta do is watch yore hand to play safe. Yo're so —— slow with a gun."

This to Mr. Stute, who had, till the coming of this stranger, prided himself on his ability to draw. Never a person of equable temper, Mr. Stute now lost his head. He shifted his feet and struck left-handed at his tormentor's face. A blue flash arced in the lamplight, steel struck bone with a cracking snap, and Mr. Stute thumped down on his knees at Henderson's feet. Mr. Stute's features were convulsed with pain, he grunted like a pig. It may be said that he suffered.

Henderson took a step backward, the long gun with whose barrel he had broken Mr. Stute's wrist, swinging at his knee.

"Yuh hadn't oughta make a break like that," he observed dispassionately, addressing Mr. Stute, but watching with alert care the spectators. "Once again the hand is quicker than the eye."

A great silence, marred solely by the porcine plaints of Mr. Stute, was upon the roomful. The women after their kind, looked at Mr. Stute, the men at Henderson. No one moved.

The bartender was the first to recover himself. His hands, which had been resting on the bar, slid slowly inward. His body became rigid.

"I s'pose they's a six-shooter behind the bar," drawled Henderson. "Hop to it, feller."

The bartender's hands froze to the wood. The red-haired girl, with two round red dapplings of rouge on cheeks from which all the blood had receded, shook her half-naked shoulders and stumbled forward to the side of Mr. Stute, and slipped a hand beneath his quivering armpit.

"Get a hold o' yoreself, Tom!" she

shrilled. "Gimme a lift here, some o' yuh! We gotta get him to bed!"

It was borne in upon Henderson that he had outstayed his welcome. He and Chuck Morgan oozed warily crabwise through the doorway into the street.

"Yuh shore have put Tom in the discard for a spell," chuckled Morgan, when their legs were straddling the log near Lainey's corral gate.

"I expect," mourned Henderson. "—— his soul! What'd he have to come squinchin' 'round for? I wanted to look over them women."

"Huh?" The surprise in Morgan's tone was patent.

"Rufe met one of 'em after he left the dance-hall that night," explained Henderson.

"Yuh never told me that!"

"I was goin' to. Anyway, yuh know now."

"Howdja find it out?"

"A li'l bluebird with pink whiskers told me."

"She's gotta be true then. Pink whiskers never lie. Which one of them floozies was it?"

"That's what I gotta find out."

"Djuh think the woman downed him?"

"I dunno what to think yet," dodged Henderson. "I was aimin' to sort o' get acquainted with them females."

"It don't seem like a woman would carve a feller the way Rufe Thompson was carved," Morgan said soberly.

"Yuh can't tell. Yuh can't tell nothin' about it. Gotta wait, that's all. Tomorrow me an' Longhorn Simms are ridin' out to the 88 to buy hosses an' mules. Maybe I'll know somethin' by the time I get back."

"Maybe yuh won't get back."

"I don't look sickly, do I?"

"I'm goin' too," declared Chuck Morgan.

"You ain't. Two's company. Yo're gonna stay here. Yuh can pitch hoss shoes with Piney Jackson, if yuh like."

"I don't like. Not a —— like. Longhorn's one bad actor, I'm tellin' yuh."

"Yuh talk like Longhorn's a crowd, or somethin'."

"He'll cold-deck yuh. Him an' Stute's thicker'n two drunkards with a jug."

"I know Longhorn's crooked as a dog's hind leg, but I like to gamble, always have. Don'tcha fret. Me an' Mister Simms will scatter along all same Sunday-school scholars on a picnic."

"She'll be one helluva picnic," averred the doubting Mr. Morgan, and let the subject drop.

It is not in the range code to insist that a friend is not utterly capable of taking care of himself.

CHAPTER IX

THE ARTFUL DODGER

AT PRECISELY four o'clock in the morning Henderson led his yellow horse through the gateway of Lainey's corral. It was daylight. The sun was just rising over the eastern hills. The windows of the hotel shone redly in the flat rays. Henderson swung up and rode out into Main Street.

Longhorn Simms, his mount a staring white pony with black legs, loped out from behind the blacksmith shop. A flicker of bright interest gleamed in Henderson's gray eyes at sight of the white pony.

"Mornin'," was the gambler's greeting.

"Howdy," returned Henderson. "We'd oughta make it before grub-time tonight."

"Shore ought—if we keep a-movin," concurred the gambler, and fell in at Henderson's side.

Their fifty-yard shadows streaking splotchily the ground on the right, they single-footed out upon the trail to the south. As they rode they discussed amicably the meager news of cowland—reports of rustling beyond the Hogpen range; the lynching of a horse-thief by the impulsive citizens of Marysville; the backsliding of Tommy Mull, Cutter's hotelkeeper.

"Which that Tommy Mull shore celebrated when he jumped the fence," said Longhorn Simms. "An' he wants everybody in on it, too. He goes the limit, that jigger does, an' Cutter shore has a savage time. Why, the station boss an' his helper is so drunk Whisky Jim has to catch up his teams his own self."

"Anybody killed?"

"Naw, course two or three has to quarrel, but pie-eyed gents most gen'ally miss, an' they was an' they did."

"Tha's good. The Territory aint got so many folks she can afford to go shy any inhabitants unless they's a reason. I hear they was a feller rubbed out here a couple o' months ago."

"Less'n that—six or seven weeks. Rufe Thompson his name was."

"Some old silver-tip, huh?"

"Young jigger, under thirty."

"Yeah? I didn't know he was young as that. Sliced all up, they said."

"Shore was."

"An' they never found out who done it?"

"Not yet. When they do he'll be lynched whoever he is. She was shore one cowardly killin'." Both Mr. Simms' manner and tone were righteously indignant.

"I hear the dead gent didn't have a chance."

"Course not. His gun wasn't even pulled."

"Whadda you guess?" Thus, casually, Mr. Henderson.

"Some gent had a grudge against him, that's a cinch," the gambler declared with conviction. "Else why would he carve him all up thataway? Some gent with a grudge, I say. Jake oughta do somethin'."

"They say they's no evidence."

"They must be some. Find the gent with a grudge. He's the one done it." The grudge theory seemed an obsession with Mr. Simms.

"I guess maybe yo're right," said Mr. Henderson, and rolled a meticulous cigaret.

It was to be observed that, while building the slim roll, his hands were held low between his middle and the saddle-horn. A hand in this position is enabled to go after a six-shooter concealed under a vest without loss of time.

The cigaret completed, between his lips and lighted, Henderson's right hand fell away to his side, the fingers brushing the butt of the gun tied down on his right leg. Mr. Simms rode on that side. Henderson had carefully maneuvered him into that position at the start.

He was leaving nothing to chance, although he did not believe that Mr. Simms would become personally and actively hostile. He believed that a radically different plan of action skulked behind the black eyes of Mr. Simms.

In perfect conversational accord the two men topped Indian Ridge and rode down the reverse slope. At the foot of the ridge the trail ducks in and out of a shallow draw. Which draw runs west and east. Henderson elected to turn westward along the draw. Mr. Simms voiced instant and vigorous objection.

"Why not?" Henderson wished to know.

"Why for?" countered the gambler. "Here's the trail. We're a-ridin' it now. Whatsa use o' squanderin' all over the range thisaway? Hard goin' over west, too. They's some hills we'll have to go 'round. We'll lose time."

"I heard this was a short-cut," wavered Henderson.

"Yuh heard wrong. She's ten miles longer, easy."

"Shore?"

"Shore as yo're a foot high."

"Then le's go by the draw. I'm feelin' just like one long ride."

The smile of Mr. Henderson was disarming in its innocence.

"I tell yuh—" began Mr. Simms.

"Don't tell her too hard," suggested Henderson. "Yuh might waste yore breath —or somethin'."

The gambler strove to read Henderson's eyes, but they told him nothing.

"Aw right," he said ungraciously. "We'll go yore way, an' I'm tellin' yuh yuh'll wish yuh hadn't."

"I'll remember," Henderson told him cordially. "If yo're wrong I won't hold it against yuh."

"You'll see," grumbled the gambler.

Familiar discourse ceased for several hours. Not till noon became afternoon did Mr. Simms break the silence.

"Yuh seem to know this country —— well," observed Mr. Simms.

"I've been askin' questions," said Henderson. "Where's that hard sleddin' you was talkin' about?"

"Well, she's miles longer anyway," Mr. Simms defended lamely.

"Yeah? We'll see. Go yuh ten we reach the 88 before supper."

"I ain't bettin'," grunted the gambler. "I dunno as I wanta go no further. Guess maybe I'll be leavin' yuh."

"I wouldn't do that," drawled Henderson the palm of his hand resting as if by chance, on the butt of his gun. "I like yore company, Mister Simms. Yo're amusin'. Yo're amusin' as all hell."

A man of hastier nerves would have immediately resented Henderson's innuendo. But Mr. Simms manifested perfect control over his nervous system and proved himself a highly dangerous citizen by smiling amiably.

"I'm glad yuh think so," said he. "In

my business I can't afford to make folks laugh."

"Yuh shore make me laugh," grinned Henderson.

But the gambler merely smiled again.

THEY rode silently onward through the hot, bright afternoon, the tension between them growing with every step of their horses' feet. Relative to shooting the gambler Henderson felt no compunction. It was shoot or be shot. And Simms had the call. Henderson, secure in the belief that he himself had the edge, waited serenely. No amount of tension could affect his nerves.

So the minutes passed without incident till Tom Dowling of the 88 galloped out of a draw and swung in their direction.

"Well, I'll bedam if it ain't Bill Henderson!" bawled Tom Dowling, when he was close upon them. "H'are yuh, Bill? Howdy, Simms."

Tom crowded his horse alongside and heartily shook Henderson's hand.

"This is shore luck," declared Tom, "runnin' up on you two gents thisaway. I guessed I'd have to ride in alone. Comin' to hunt you a job, Bill? We're a man short."

"No, I ain't, Tom. Me an' Mister Simms is just ridin' out on business. Is Lanpher still manager?"

"Shore he is. But most o' the outfit's new since you was here."

"I was right the first time," cut in Mr. Simms, addressing Henderson. "Yuh do know this country pretty well."

"I oughta," Henderson averred complacently. "Yuh see, I used to work for the 88."

"Yuh didn't tell me that," fretted Mr. Simms.

"Guess I forgot. My memory gives me a heap o' trouble sometimes."

"I expect."

Tom Dowling began to sense that all was not smooth between these two. He wondered why. Henderson turned his head slightly and winked at him, thus completing the puncher's mystification.

Henderson was now smoking a much needed cigaret. He could afford to quite safely. Mr. Simms would not dare make conspicuously uncalled-for war in the presence of Tom Dowling. Henderson almost laughed.

So, in the late afternoon, they came to the squat buildings and broad corrals of the 88 ranch. From the open doorway of the ranch-house kitchen drifted the clatter of a snarling voice laying down the law.

"An' I tell yuh, cookie," nagged the voice, "that coffee tasted like dishwater. You make a good potful tonight, an' see she's good. An' don't fry the steak to leather like yuh done the last time. Think my teeth is steel, or somethin'? Well, they ain't, an' I don't aim to wear 'em out neither."

"Lanpher must be home," observed Henderson.

"Sounds that way," chuckled Tom Dowling. "He lays out cookie reg'lar once a week. Says it keeps him from gettin' uppity. 'F I was cookie I'd shore crawl his hump a few, but cookie don't giveadam. He just laughs."

A slim little rat of a man with a narrow, frowning face appeared in the kitchen doorway and surveyed the three horsemen.

"Howdy, Bill," said the little man, walking toward them. "H'are yuh, Longhorn? I s'pose now yuh want a job, Bill, huh?"

"Not me, Lanpher," replied Henderson, backing and turning his horse till he faced both Simms and the 88 manager. "I come here to buy hosses an' mules. Longhorn Simms says yuh got both to sell."

"Well, I ain't, not by a jugful," denied Lanpher. "I need all my ponies, an' I wouldn't sell my four mules at no price nohow."

"I guess now yuh must 'a' made a mistake, Simms," drawled Henderson.

"Maybe I did," said the gambler, levelly regarding Henderson.

"Yeah, I guess so. But you didn't make no mistake when yuh cinched yore saddle on that white cayuse so yore bushwhackin' friends hidin' along the trail some'ers would know we was comin' a long way off an' have time to get ready a-plenty."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" asked Mr. Simms, his sinister features depicting intense amazement.

"I ain't through talkin' yet," pursued Henderson, as the prudent Lanpher skipped nimbly in one direction and Tom Dowling jumped his horse in another. "I'd just like to know why Tom Stute's friends gotta horn in on his quarrel? Why can't they let Tom settle it when he gets ready 'stead o' smoochin' 'round tryin' to wipe me out thisaway?"

"Yo're crazy!" cried Mr. Simms.

"Don'tcha s'pose I know it was you cut down on me from behind Jackson's blacksmith shop that night?" snapped Henderson at a venture.

Mr. Simms ceased to dissemble. His right hand flicked to his vest-pocket, and it flicked with speed. But Henderson's agile fingers were a split-second speedier. Mr. Simms, a neat hole in his right shoulder, swayed, clutched at the saddle-horn, missed his grip and pitched backward to the ground.

As has been said, Mr. Simms was a hard citizen. There was still a deal of fight in Mr. Simms. He writhed sidewise, and went after his other derringer left-handed. Henderson accurately drove a bullet through his left elbow. Mr. Simms went flat, his nose in the dirt, and mumbled curses through set teeth.

"Y'all seen it," said Henderson, cold gray eyes sweeping Lanpher, Tom Dowling and the open-mouthed cook in one comprehensive glance. "He went after his gun first."

"Shore he did," Lanpher made haste to assure him.

"It was an even break, y'betcha," pronounced Tom Dowling.

The cook said nothing. He was too filled with awe to utter a word. It was the first time he had ever seen a man shot.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW ARRIVAL

"YOU come back alone yest'day. The boys wanna know where Longhorn Simms is at?" It was the marshal of Farewell speaking.

He loomed above Henderson where the latter sat in his tip-tilted chair in front of the hotel.

"What boys?" drawled Henderson, looking at the marshal with sleepy eyes.

"Longhorn's friends. An'——"

"He's got friends, huh? I didn't know that."

Henderson shook the ash from his cigaret with a flirt of his wrist and grinned at the marshal.

"Don't get gay," warned the marshal. "Tell——"

"I ain't gettin' gay," denied Henderson. "I'm solemn as a graveyard. What I can't see is why them friends o' Longhorn's don't come to me personal. What they got to send you for?"

"They didn't send me. I come myself. An' Jake Rule an' Kansas Casey are comin' in a minute."

"Then I'll wait till they come. No use o' tellin' the same thing twice, is they, Marshal?"

The officer made no reply. He stepped heavily to the chair temporarily vacated by Bill Lainey and sat down. Henderson turned a lazy head and looked northward along Main Street. The sheriff's combination house and office was the outermost building at the north end of town. A group of men were standing in front of the sheriff's house. While Henderson sat at gaze the official front door opened, the sheriff and Kansas Casey issued and joined the waiting group. By twos and threes, Jake Rule and his deputy in the lead, the little crowd moved briskly southward.

"Ben Skeel, Shorty Vang, Torney an' Lamp Black," Henderson said to himself, his eyes following the progress of the sheriff and his train, "Eagle River Pete, an' Bill Chase. All they need is Tom Stute to make her complete."

He flipped his cigaret-butt into the air and hooked his long thumbs in his belt.

"Looks like visitors," observed Chuck Morgan, suddenly appearing in the hotel doorway.

"Don't it," said Henderson.

Chuck Morgan leaned hipshot against the door jamb. His eyes shone with pleasurable anticipation.

Opposite the Happy Heart the sheriff and his followers changed direction and headed diagonally across the street toward the hotel. Mike Flynn, sitting on the doorsill of his shop, stood up as the crowd passed him and stumped hurriedly indoors.

The sheriff and his following halted at the edge of the sidewalk in front of Henderson. Jake Rule and his deputy were in front. The others remained modestly in the rear. There was no crowding.

"Where's Longhorn Simms?" the sheriff asked without preliminary.

"At the 88 ranch," replied Henderson.

"What's he stayin' there for?"

"'Cause he can't ride."

"Why can't he ride?"

"'Cause I had to plug him."

"What'd I tell yuh?" cried foxy-faced Ben Skeel.

"Whatja plug him for?" the sheriff kept squarely to the main issue.

"Whadda yuh gen'ally plug a jigger for?" drawled Henderson. "'Cause yuh like him or somethin'?"

"Whadja plug him for?" Jake Rule persisted patiently.

"We had a argument, an' Longhorn went after his gun first."

"That's a—" began Shorty Vang, and cleared his throat raucously instead of completing the sentence.

"Shorty seems to have a cold," observed Henderson. "What was yuh gonna say, Shorty? Le's hear it."

Shorty, looking anywhere save at Henderson, glimpsed Mike Flynn sidewheeling across the street. In the hollow of Mike's arm rested a sawed-off Greener. Mike sat down on a fortuitous whisky keg in front of the next house and nursed the shotgun across his knees. There was a slight stir among the friends and employees of Mr. Simms. The sheriff glanced over his shoulder.

"Whatcha doin', Mike?" he demanded.

"Clanin' me Greener," replied the Irishman, jerking a blue bandanna from a hip-pocket and proceeding to vigorously polish his armament.

Jake Rule's wide mouth twitched at the corners. He said no more to Mike Flynn, but turned again to Henderson.

"Yuh say Simms went after his gun first," remarked the sheriff.

"Yep."

"All right. I ain't doubtin' yore word, but I'm gonna send my deputy over to the 88 an' see what they say. I s'pose now they was witnesses?"

"Shore was. Lanpher, Tom Dowlin' an' the cook. They all seen it."

"That'll be good—for you. While we're waitin' for my deputy to come back—Kansas, you better start right now—while we're waitin' you'll have to give up yore gun an' roost in the calaboose."

"Not me," Henderson declared cheerfully. "I don't hand over no gun, an' I don't stick in no calaboose, none whatever. I ain't got nothin' against you, Sheriff, personal, but if you go to throw down on me this deal will finish in the smoke."

"What he says goes double for me, Jake," Chuck Morgan announced quietly.

The hammers of Mike Flynn's shotgun clicked suggestively to full cock.

Jake Rule hesitated. He was a brave man. He had gone against the iron many times. But there are moments when to walk softly is the course of wisdom. He knew nothing of Henderson, but he did know that Mike Flynn and Chuck Morgan of the C Y were numbered among the foremost citizens of the county. Behind Chuck Morgan was the might and influence of the great Bar S ranch. Jack Richie, the Cross-in-a-box manager, and his hard-riding outfit, were Chuck's warm and partisan friends. Election day would arrive in November, and the sheriff had his heart set on a third term. The contest would be close. The sheriff was in a quandary. Politics is indeed a dreadful thing.

"Tell yuh what, Jake," said Chuck Morgan suddenly. "Yuh know me. Take my word he won't skip till yo're good an' satisfied the shootin' was on the level.

"Take mine too," cut in Mike Flynn. "If Mister Henderson don't stay here in town I'll give yuh my store."

AT THIS juncture Miss Blythe came out of the Blue Pigeon and ran across the street to the knot of men in front of the hotel. She hopped up on the sidewalk and faced the sheriff. Henderson stood up and took a step toward her.

"What do you want with him?" she demanded hysterically, her small fists doubled so tightly that the knuckles showed white. "Your wife just told me you were going to put him in jail for shooting a man. If he did the man deserved it. You shan't put him in jail! I tell you, you shan't!"

Miss Blythe, pink-cheeked, stamped her foot at the sheriff. The latter backed away and flapped futile hands at the excited young lady.

"Now, ma'am," he began helplessly. "Now, ma'am——"

"Go away, ma'am, please," begged the scandalized Henderson, laying a hand on her arm.

"I won't!" she snapped without looking at him, and jerked her arm free. "I won't till I know what that man intends to do!"

She glared upon "that man." The wretched sheriff gulped. It was his custom to tell his wife everything. He cursed the custom now.

"Lookit here, Sheriff," Henderson said, "s'pose I come down to yore office an' stay 'round you till Kansas gets back. How's that?"

"Fine," the sheriff agreed thankfully. "Chuck better come too."

"There, see, everythin's all right," Henderson told Miss Blythe.

Miss Blythe squeezed the palms of her hands against her hot cheeks. She dropped her arms and turned away.

"It had better be," she said wearily, and walked with drooping shoulders back to the Blue Pigeon.

"Any time yo're ready, Henderson," hinted Jake Rule.

Henderson, Chuck Morgan, the sheriff, and a commandeered friend of the latter, spurred the flitting hours with the national game of draw. It was an expensive session for the sheriff and his friend.

"I hope Kansas hurries back," the sheriff remarked at half-past ten that night.

"I don't," grinned Henderson, entrenched behind five tall columns of chips. "One card, Sheriff."

"I'll take two," said Chuck Morgan. "I ain't partic'lar if Kansas has to walk. I'm plenty strong now, but I aim to get stronger. Runnin' a ranch is expensive."

"So's cards," grieved the sheriff's friend, eying his lonely stack of whites.

Late in the afternoon of the following day Kansas Casey dismounted in front of the sheriff's house.

"Aw ——," he groaned, when he pushed open the door and perceived the card-players hunched in tense absorption over their four-square game. "Aw ——," he repeated, "I've missed somethin'."

"You ain't," denied the sheriff. "Yo're lucky to been away. Chuck an' Henderson have won about everythin' but the jail. Give 'em another ten minutes an' they'd had that."

"Ain't we gonna play no more?" Henderson cried in alarm.

"We ain't," the sheriff declared. "What did Lanpher say, Kansas?"

"Just what he said," Kansas told him, indicating Henderson with a jerk of his head.

"Then yo're plenty free to drag it, Henderson," said the sheriff.

"Thanks," Henderson said dryly. "I take it yuh want to cash in, Sheriff."

"You bet. About that gray pony an' saddle you won, Henderson—they's the saddle an' bridle in the corner, an' the cayuse is out in the corral. I'd like to buy that hoss back next month. He's the only plumb gentle pony in my string. Don't pitch, kick, bite, nor nothin'. He ain't no go-devil of a man's hoss, an' I dunno as he'd suit yuh anyway."

"He'll suit this man," grinned Henderson. "I like a quiet life once in a while. I heard he was gentle as a kitten. That's why I got yuh to bet him. So yuh see, Sheriff, just how it is."

Henderson's tone was politely regretful. The sheriff figuratively said good-by to his pet pony.

Ten minutes later Henderson, his pockets heavy with part of his winnings, was leading the saddled remainder to the hotel corral.

"Whadda you want this kind o' hoss for?" queried the inquisitive Chuck, blissfully, patting his own bulging pockets.

"Wanna see if he's gentle like I heard," was the unilluminating reply.

In the furtherance of this desire Henderson presently strapped a blanket 'round his waist, boarded his new acquisition and loped his three times 'round the corral, turned him on a dime, and trotted him the other way. Then he thumbed him, an operation which invariably elicits a buck if one is available. But the pony merely pointed inquiring ears and attended to his knitting with admirable calm. Henderson pulled up in triumph in front of Chuck, slipped to the ground, and unstrapped the leg-enshrouding blanket.

"Mostly a blanket floppin' 'round their hocks bothers even the gentlest," observed Henderson, stripping off saddle and bridle. "But not this li'l gray feller. He don't mind nothin'."

"I dunno but what I'll buy him for the wife's sister," said Chuck. "Molly's been devilin' me for a hoss all her own for the last month. 'Course this three-legged dogie ain't nothin' to brag about. Still—what'll yuh take for the li'l runt, Bill?"

"Couldn't think of it nohow. I ain't never had a pet before. I wanna see what it feels like. Whatcha gonna do now, Chuck?"

"Eat. Le's have a smile at the Starlight first."

"Aw right. Meet yuh there in half an hour. Got a li'l business to fix up first."

"Oh yeah, shore," yapped Chuck, his tongue in his cheek. "Gotta go to the Blue Pigeon an' get yuh some smokin', huh?"

"Cartridges, cowboy, cartridges," was the unsmiling reply as Henderson straightway departed.

"That Blythe lady is shore handsome," the deserted Chuck admitted to the gray pony. "But she can't hold a candle to my Jane," he added loyally.

"I got a gentle hoss for yuh," announced Henderson from the doorway of the Blue Pigeon. "Why—whatsa matter?"

For Miss Blythe, white-faced, was staring through the front window with wide, fear-stricken eyes.

"That man!" she gasped, her hands at her breast. "He's followed me!"

Henderson wheeled and looked critically at a passing rider. The latter was a tall fellow mounted on a black-and-white pinto. He dismounted at the Happy Heart hitching-rail, tied his horse, and went in.

"You mean the gent on the paint pony?" Henderson turned to Miss Blythe.

"Yes," she whispered miserably.

"What's he done?" he asked, coming forward to the counter and leaning on it with spread arms.

The girl gazed blankly up at Henderson. She presssed a shaking hand against her throat. The courage which had enabled her to face the sheriff had forsaken her utterly.

"He said I'd never get away," she stammered through chattering teeth. "He said he'd follow me and find me, and he has."

"It won't do him a bit o' good," guaranteed Henderson, taking possession of her hand and patting it awkwardly. "I'll—I'll be right back."

He swung about and started toward the door.

"No! No!" cried Miss Blythe in a panic and darted beneath the hinged flap at the end of the counter and seized his arm with both hands. "You mustn't!" she almost sobbed. "You mustn't do anything! You mustn't! Do you hear?"

He looked down at her, his eyes frostily sinister. Gently he strove to disengage her fingers from their grip. She clung the harder and began to cry.

"Oh, I wish I were dead!" she wept, her dark-brown head pressed against his sleeve.

This was different. Henderson decided to postpone for a space his chat with the pinto's owner.

"Le's talk it over," he suggested. "It's almost six. Mike won't care if yuh lock up without waitin' for him to come back. Here, gimme the key, an' you skip right over to the hotel. I'll see yuh after supper."

The distraught Miss Blythe snatched the key from its hook between the ammunition calendars, slapped it into Henderson's hand, and started streetward. She started back with equal suddenness. For the tall owner of the black-and-white pinto blocked the doorway.

HE WAS a lithe citizen, this person, broad-shouldered, thin-flanked, and handsome with that dissolute form of comeliness popularly ascribed to Lucifer, the fallen angel.

At sight of the shrinking girl, the man's light eyes widened with enjoyment. His full lips parted in a smile. Henderson he disregarded wholly. Lucifer's horizon, mental and visual, at that moment was the frightened Miss Blythe.

"This is shore luck," averred the newcomer, taking a forward step and pushing back his wide hat. "I never knowed when I come in here for tobacco I was gonna find you." The bantering tone of his voice changed abruptly to one of dark menace as he drove the question at her. "Whadja run away for?"

"Maybe she wouldn't choose to answer," Henderson interposed mildly.

The stranger whirled like a cat, ready hand dropping.

"Don't," advised Henderson. "A pocket derringer's a handy li'l thing," he added meaningly.

Henderson's right hand was in his trousers pocket. A significant protuberance bulged within that pocket. The would-be exponent of truculence promptly hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and leaned back against the counter.

"Yo're gettin' careless," continued Henderson softly. "Yore holster's tied down so yuh can't shoot from the hip, an' she's wore out so bad the foresight has busted through an' snagged in the leather. I could 'a' got yuh forty times while you was wrestlin' with yore gun. You'd oughta file that foresight or buy a new holster—or somethin'."

"Dj'ever try mindin' yore own business?' queried the stranger coldly.

"When I feel like it."

"They say a gent don't never get sick or nothin' mindin' his own business."

"I've heard that too."

"I aim to be in town a while."

"Stay as long as yuh like. She's a free country."

"Maybe I'll see yuh again."

"Don't strain yoreself."

"I guess this'll be all for now. Joy, I'll be back later—when you ain't so busy."

"The lady will always be busy—to you," Henderson declared pleasantly.

"Think so?"

"Shore as yo're a foot high. Stranger, listen here. The minute you step in this store, the minute you open yore yap to this lady, you come a-runnin', 'cause I will."

"Yo're figurin' on bein' right busy," sneered the stranger.

"It ain't no trouble to curry a li'l short hoss, no trouble a-tall."

"We'll see."

"My eyesight's always been plumb good," said Henderson.

The stranger set his hat straight and jingled out into the street. Henderson, watching through the window, saw him stride quickly up to his horse, seize him by the bit and kick the unfortunate animal six times in the stomach. After which the stranger belted the pinto over the head with the butt of his wire-wound quirt, kicked him again for good measure, and swaggered into the Happy Heart.

Henderson viewed the preceding exhibition of brutality with indifference. Not that he was callous to the suffering of dumb animals. He was by nature kind to his own, and beat them only when necessity demanded that they be beaten. But he was wholly of the cow-country, and in the cow-country a man's horse is his chattel to do with as he will. To interfere between them is inconceivable.

Henderson turned back to Miss Blythe who was mopping her eyes with a totally inadequate handkerchief and fighting to regain control of herself. She looked up at him bravely.

"I'm an awful bub-baby," she stuttered. "Bub-but he sus-scares me so."

"He won't no more. Come along now. Yo're through for this day."

She obeyed him meekly.

"I don't want any supper," she said dully, on the way to the hotel.

"Me neither. We can go out back o' the corral, where we was before if yuh like, an' yuh can talk all yuh want."

He was taking it for granted that she was to tell him her troubles. She seemed to take it for granted, too.

"I thought you were going to shoot him there in the store," she told him with a shiver.

"I couldn't 'a' shot him," he said simply, "not with what I had in my pocket. I didn't have no derringer. I just stuck my thumb against the cloth an' bluffed him out."

Miss Blythe made no comment. She was realizing more and more fully that this person with the washed-out gray eyes was not as other men.

CHAPTER XI

A TROUBLOUS TALE

"I'M FROM the East," she said, sitting on a split cracker-box behind the corral, while he squatted on one heel facing her, "Whitewillow, Minnesota. Father died when I was a baby, and mother died last year. There were only two of us then, my brother Tim and myself. Tim couldn't see any opportunity in Whitewillow. He was always ambitious, and always talking about the West. That was the place to succeed in. He had the Western fever badly.

"After mother went Tim decided to go West. He left me in Whitewillow to wait till he could send for me. I worked for the village dressmaker. I can sew pretty well, and trim hats too.

"Tim wrote me that he had taken up a claim ten miles east of Marysville, the county-seat of Fort Creek County, this Territory."

"Must 'a' been on Calf Creek," said Henderson.

"It is—at the Twin Springs," nodded Miss Blythe. "Three months ago Tim sent for me. I came. Within the month Tim's horse reared over backward. Tim couldn't roll free in time. The horn caught him in the stomach. He only lived two days."

The girl fell abruptly silent and looked out across the flats.

Henderson looked at the ground and swore silently. Miss Blythe's clipped recital was making it increasingly evident that the burdens of this imperfect world are not shared equally by men and women.

Miss Blythe planted her elbows on her knees, clasped her hands, and continued:

"I stayed on at the claim. It was pretty lonely. But I didn't know what else to do. I didn't care to go back to Whitewillow. I haven't relatives there, or anywhere, that I know of. I tried to sell our cattle and two of the horses. I couldn't find a buyer for them, but I knew if I could stick it out and prove up on the claim that I might be able to sell it later and go somewhere else where—where I could find my own kind of work.

"Then Sam Bellows came. That's the man you drove out of the store—the man I'm afraid of. He saw me one day when I rode into Marysville for supplies, and he followed me out to the claim. He tried to make lul-love to me."

Henderson remained outwardly calm. Inwardly he seethed with a great seething.

"I managed to throw a kettle of boiling water at him," she went on. "He jumped backward and didn't get scalded much. I got Tim's gun and threatened to shoot him if he didn't go away. He went away, but he said he'd come back. He did—that night. He tried to break in, and I fired through the door, and I heard him laugh and ride away.

"The next day I went to Marysville and appealed to the marshal for protection. The marshal laughed at me and said I must have encouraged Bellows. Encouraged him! I!

"He came into the office while I was talking to the marshal, and the marshal asked him about it. Bellows said he was just trying to help me and that I imagined—things. The marshal told me to go home and not bother him any more, that I had no business nestering on Calf Creek anyway. You see, the marshal had a ranch on the creek only a few miles from ours, and our cows used to run with his, I expect. But we only had a few—forty-two head. And it really is free range."

"It shore is, ma'am. Lookit here, why didn'tcha go to Judge Allison?"

"Judge Allison? I never heard of him. Who's he?"

"The Federal judge. He lives in Marysville. He's one white gent, an' he'd 'a' seen yuh through."

"Oh, I wish I'd known that! But I didn't, and I went home as fast as I could. Bellows came after me, but I beat him to the house, and I rode the horse right into the kitchen and barred the door again. I had the gun and I shot through the window at him, but I'd never fired a gun before, and I missed him. He walked right up to the window and dared me to fire again. I wanted to fire again. I couldn't. I tried, and I couldn't. He just stood there laughing at me while I was pointing the gun at him. But—he didn't come in. He said he'd be back the next day, and it wouldn't do me any good to run away, he'd follow and find me no matter where I went.

"That night I packed some clothes in a bag, wrapped my blue dress and high shoes in a slicker, and nailed up the door. I hated to leave the place. It—it was my home, mine and Tim's. But I'm going back, of course, when things quiet down a little. I turned the other two horses out of the corral so they could get grass and water, poor things, and rode away. I traveled northwest till I came to a trail that I knew must be the trail to Farewell and Paradise Bend. I meant to go to Paradise Bend.

"So I changed to my blue dress and other shoes where some box-elders grew beside a little creek, wrapped my corduroy skirt and flannel shirtwaist in the slicker and hid the bundle with my saddle and bridle in the box-elders. Then I drove my horse away and went back to the trail to wait for the stage.

"I had some money in a little bag pinned inside my—my dress, and I had some more in my sus-stocking, and while I was sitting on my bag waiting for the stage I felt for the money in my stocking, and there was only a big hole. I suppose it chafed its way through while I was riding. Anyway, it was gone."

"But money's heavy. Didn't yuh feel it slippin' or somethin'?"

Henderson reddened vividly.

"I didn't feel it go. You see, it wasn't in gold. It was in bills—what I'd saved while I worked in Whitewillow. Well, I went back to the box-elders and hunted and hunted, but of course I didn't find it. In the morning when the stage came by I took it, and I found I only had enough to pay my way to Farewell with a little over. So now you know all about me—everything."

She rested her chin on her hands and stared unseeingly over Henderson's head.

"I see," said he slowly, "I see. Yuh—say, where didja try to sell them cows?"

"In Marysville. I didn't know where else to go."

"Who'djuh ask?"

"I asked the marshal first. He owned the next ranch, and I thought, naturally, he'd be willing. He wasn't, though."

"Ask any one else?"

"I asked several other men, and one did say he would if the price was right. I made it right, and he agreed to come out the next day and arrange things. But he didn't come, and when I saw him and asked him, he said he'd changed his mind and wouldn't buy at any price."

"Who might this changeable jigger be?" Henderson asked softly.

"His name is Lafe Scattergood."

"Oh, Lafe. Yeah, I know Lafe by sight. What is yore iron, ma'am—yore brand?"

"The Lazy T, left hip, cows and horses."

"I see. Well, yuh'd better go in the hotel now, an' don't think no more o' what's happened."

"What are you going to do?" she asked quietly.

"Why nothin', nothin' a-tall. I——"

"You mustn't pick a quarrel with Bellows. I forbid you to."

"I didn't say I was gonna——"

"You don't have to say it. I know exactly what's in your mind. You mustn't shoot him."

"But, ma'am, they's nothin' else to do with a party like that."

"Never mind. You've warned him, that's enough."

"S'pose now he don't believe in warnin's," suggested hopeful Henderson.

"You'll have to wait till—till he does something. I couldn't bear it if you killed him on my account, unless——"

She hesitated.

"Yeah? Unless?"

"Unless it were absolutely necessary, and it isn't necessary now. You yourself can see that. You must promise me not to do anything to him till he gives you a reason."

"He has already."

"Do you promise?"

"All right." Sulkily.

"This means you mustn't go out of your way to seek a quarrel."

"All right, I won't. But if he comes huntin' one with me, that's a heap different."

"Of course. You're the judge in that case. You're awfully good, Mr. Henderson. I like you. You're—you're nice."

She stood up quickly, seized his big hand where it hung over his knee, pressed it tightly between her warm palms, and was gone.

Henderson got to his feet in a daze. He lifted the hand she had pressed and inspected it closely, front and back.

"My Gawd!" he whispered in an awed tone. "My Gawd!"

CHUCK MORGAN was finishing his fifth cup of coffee when Henderson joined him in the Canton.

"I didn't do no waitin' in the Starlight," remarked Chuck with a wink. "I kind o' thought you'd forget about it."

"Shore did. When yuh get through gugglin' that coffee, pass me the bread. Me, I could eat a raw dog. Howdy, Sing Luey. How about a small steak with lots o' gravy, 'taters fried thick an' canned corn?"

The inscrutable Sing Luey inclined a grave head and padded kitchenward, hurling ahead of him a long string of clicking Chinese.

"Sounds like bustin' boxes," criticized Chuck.

"Don't," whispered Henderson, dealing Chuck's ankle a hearty kick beneath the table. "He's all right, an' he's a friend o' mine."

"Even if he is, yuh don't have to break my leg, yuh —— mule," snarled Chuck, upsetting a glass of water into Henderson's lap. "Now we're even, an' you keep yore hoofs at home. Here, don't glom all the butter! I was figurin' on another piece o' bread."

"G'wan, yo're stuffed like a guess-hawg now," replied Henderson, serenely troweling on the butter. "Pass the sugar so's I can sand down this dobie. Try it. She's good thisaway."

"I might if they was any butter," Chuck flung back, and consoled himself with a cigaret.

After supper Henderson and Chuck went

out into the night, and by devious ways approached the dance-hall. They did not enter. They lay full-length upon the gentle slope of the lean-to attached to Dolan's warehouse, and looked in through an open window. It was a window of fair size. They could see the full length of the bar, the greater part of the dancing-floor, and the people respectively thereat and thereon.

Henderson followed with hard, gloomy eyes the gyrations of the five *demi-mondaines*.

"I'd shore admire to know which o' them Jezebels now——"

He did not complete the muttered sentence.

"Take yore choice," whispered Chuck.

"Guess I'll have to. Yuh can't tell a —— thing by lookin' at 'em. An' yuh can't talk to 'em now without they'd start guessin' what yuh was drivin' at."

"Yuh done told me most o' that before," fleered Chuck.

"Yore memory's improvin'. First thing you know, yuh'll be growin' a crop o' brains, then maybe yuh'll be some help to a feller an'—djever see that specimen before—jigger just come in—leather chaps?"

"Shore. Name's Sam Bellows. Rides for the 88."

"Now?"

"Did last I heard. This is the first I seen of him for six months. He's a ring-tail hellion, if you ask me."

"He looks it."

"Don't he?"

The poor creature, Snakebite, was shambling across the barroom. He bumped by chance the shoulder of Bellows. Instantly that evil-tempered character knocked Snakebite flat. Swearing horribly Bellows proceeded to kick the scrabbling Snakebite across the floor and through the doorway into the street. Which having been accomplished to his satisfaction Bellows advanced to the bar, loudly inviting all and sundry to join him in liquor.

"Told yuh he was mama's own darling," whispered Chuck. "Five minutes with gentle Sam makes a hoss headshy for life. When it comes to plumb hound-meanness thataway he's got a Piute lookin' like a silver saint."

"Will he stand the acid?"

"Every time. He's got guts, I'll say that for Sam."

"A reg'lar, shore-'nough bad-man, huh?"

"Y'betcha."

"Ain't nobody ever crawled his hump?"

"Two to my knowledge."

"At the same time?"

"Different times. Him an' 'Skeeter' Riley had a argument in the 88 bunk-house last Winter. They buried Riley next day. After the Spring round-up when the outfits was all in town Sam got into a game o' stud with 'Slim' Berdan—he was marshal then, Slim was—an' some other fellers. Which that game shore wound up in the smoke. The marshal's cashed, an' Sam's done it."

"A marshal! She's a wonder this active party wasn't lynched instanter. Whatsa matter with this town?"

"Well, yuh see, the marshal wasn't in the game official-like. He's just playin' to pass the time an' be friendly, an' everybody heard him call Sam a liar, so she's just another even break. After that last fraycas nobody gets familiar none with Sam."

"Yeah," muttered Henderson, "yeah. Le's wander. Lookin' at them painted floozies makes me sick. It ain't a —— bit o' help. I'd have to wring their necks to find out anythin'. Le's go down to the Starlight an' run a blazer on the barkeep. He's funny."

CHAPTER XII

HENDERSON MOVES

IT WAS long past midnight when Chuck, sleeping lightly, was awakened by the pressure of Henderson's fingers on his wrist.

"'Tsall right, Chuck, lay quiet," whispered Henderson, his mouth close to Chuck's ear lest their fellow-guests in the room be awakened. "I gotta slide out for a li'l while. Begone a week maybe."

"Whatcha gonna do?" asked Chuck, fearful that he might miss some excitement.

"Nemmine what I'm gonna do. I ain't none sure myself yet. Tell yuh when I get back. You don't have to stay here. All I want yuh to do is pay Lainey my board—here's the money—an' have him 'tend to my gray hoss. I dunno just what to do about Miss Blythe." He broke off and scratched his guileful head. "This Sam Bellows has sort o' been annoyin' her, I guess. I warned him off, an' he took it."

"He did!" The astonished Chuck raised himself on his elbow. "You never told me."

"My memory's bad. Lay still, for Gawd's sake! No need o' wakin' the neighbors. I was thinkin' with me gone Bellows might get to actin' up. Maybe yuh'd better pass the word to Jake an' Kansas to sort o' look-out her game while Sam's 'round."

"'Taint necessary," Chuck said stiffly. "I'm here. I ain't no child. I got a li'l gun myself. You needn't think yo're the only he-man in the Territory."

"Now that's right friendly, Chuck," commended Henderson, precisely as if he had not known that his friend would rise to the occasion. "Yuh'll shore help me a lot thataway. Where's Willie's Old-Brother-in-Law livin' now?"

"On the Lazy, at the mouth o' Soogan. He moved camp there from some'ers up Packsaddle about two weeks ago."

"Then he's there yet. So long."

Henderson, carrying his boots under one arm, his war-bags under the other, tiptoed from the room. He opened a dining-room window, leaned out and deposited boots and war-bags on the ground. His saddle, blanket and bridle, followed the war-bags. Henderson followed the saddle, closed the window noiselessly, and, resembling nothing so much as a laden Christmas tree, made his silent way to the corral.

The moonlight enabled him to catch up his yellow horse without much trouble. But he was forced to ear the animal in order to bridle him. Once the bit was between the yellow's jaws the rest was easy. It was not the pony's custom to fight the saddle.

Henderson led the yellow out, put up the bars of the gate, mounted, and walked his horse to the street. Here he turned southward and struck into the Marysville trail. The yellow horse began to single-foot, the easy gait which eats up the long miles as fire eats the grass.

The rising sun met horse and rider paralleling the marching skirmish lines of cottonwoods fringing the course of Soogan Creek, not ten miles from where that shallow stream empties into the Lazy River. An hour and a half later Henderson topped a long ridge and saw, a short quarter-mile beyond his horse's ears, the long, broad reaches of the Lazy River. In the lush grass on the triangular flat between the northern bank of the Lazy and the eastern bank of Soogan Creek a horse-band was grazing. At the apex of the triangle were the lodges of the Rainbow's people.

There were four lodges, three large and one small. For Willie's Old-Brother-in-Law was a man of family and substance. The family comprised one wife, her two grandmothers, his two grandmothers, five assorted aunts, divers children belonging to the aunts, and his niece, the Rainbow. The substance consisted of ninety or a hundred ponies, many skins, dressed and undressed, and two dozen dogs. The latter could not be termed an asset.

The camp, of human life, lay deserted to the eye when Henderson rode in. But the dogs made him vociferously not welcome.

"Might know she wouldn't be here!" exclaimed Henderson, controlling with difficulty his agitated horse.

"That depends," said the Rainbow, suddenly appearing between the flaps of the smallest lodge. "What she in particular are you looking for, Mister Henderson?"

"Yoreself," he told her, grinning.

"That's nice. The family's gone fishing, and I'm left sucking my thumbs and dying for a man to talk to. You'll do quite well. Git, you devils!"

The order was directed at the dogs. It was accompanied by an accurate stick of firewood that solidly thumped the nearest cur in the short ribs. The pack fled howling.

"They'll be good now for a while," she observed, smiling widely. "Light and rest your hat, old-timer. I think I'll call you Bill. Mister Henderson is so formal."

"Help yourself."

"I always do. Had any breakfast?"

"Now howja know?"

"Men are always hungry. How do jerky and beans, Old Mexico style, strike you? I'll heat 'em up."

"Nemmine about heatin' 'em. I like 'em cold."

"You *are* hungry. Cold it is. But I will make coffee. I could drink another cup myself. Turn your horse out and be happy."

Henderson fashioned a rope halter with expert fingers, and picketed the yellow horse with a thirty-foot sweep. This lest the overheated animal drink himself into a state of foundered uselessness. Then Henderson unsaddled and returned to the Rainbow and food.

"Still like Joy as much as ever?" asked the Rainbow, when she had filled his plate with beans a second time.

"She's one nice girl," he parried.

"Isn't she? You didn't answer my question, though. But you needn't. I can tell by your ears. They're all red under the tan."

"Are you busy now, Miss Rainbow?"

"I will be in about ten seconds if you don't drop the 'Miss.' Lord, you confounded men give me a pain! The fresh ones are too fresh, and the nice ones are too —— nice. It's a dog's life, being a girl. What do you want anyway?"

"Help. I'm needin' it bad."

"So you come galloping straight to the Rainbow for it. All right, tell sister."

He told—at great length. The Rainbow listened with shining eyes and flattering attention.

"Can yuh get yore uncle to chime in, do yuh think?" Henderson asked anxiously, in conclusion.

"I know I can," declared the Rainbow. "He'll do anything for me, uncle will. Don't worry about that for a minute. It's all fixed. You'd better give me a letter."

"I was goin' to. I got paper an' a pencil in my war-bags. I'll get 'em."

CHAPTER XIII

EXCESSIVELY DIRTY WORK

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Henderson was nearing the Blythe homestead on Calf Creek, known locally as the Twin Springs. Henderson's movements, for the last several miles, had been furtive. He rode the draws and regarded the landscape warily.

A scant half-mile from the Springs he dismounted between two short, steep-sided hillocks spattered with a careless growth of jack-pine. He anchored his horse to a pine, took from his off saddlebag a pair of well-kept field-glasses and climbed the higher of the two hillocks.

The last few yards of the ascent he made on his hands and knees. Arriving at the top he removed his hat, lay down full-length beneath a jack-pine, and focused his glasses on the Blythe house and the environs thereof.

A haze of yellow dust was over the Blythe corral. A thin gray smoke ascended from the middle of the corral. Across the windless air came faintly to his ears the bawling of an indignant cow. Henderson's mouth, beneath the stubby mustache, straightened to a white line.

"Somebody ain't losin' a bit o' time," he observed with wrath. "An' I guess I better not lose any either."

He returned hurriedly to his horse, loosed the reins, and mounted without touching the stirrup. The yellow horse knew what signified that flying mount. He laid back his ears, tucked in his tail, and snapped at the bit.

"Slide, feller, slide," rapped out Henderson, sinking his spurs. "Split the breeze."

He whirled his quirt cross-handed and cut the yellow horse again and again behind the rear cinch. The yellow flattened out and flew. He had rolled many miles behind him since leaving Farewell, and he was tired, but he was not yet done. He responded to spurs and quirt with every ounce of strength in his tough muscles.

Taking advantage of natural cover in the shape of two dry washes and the inevitable cottonwoods on the creek bank, Henderson ran his horse to within four hundred yards of the house. Profanely praising the blessed fact that the house lay between him and the corral, he checked his mount, dismounted and knotted the reins 'round a tree's slim bole.

He dragged a Winchester from the scabbard under the right fender and went forward on foot. No Indian could have moved more quietly than did Henderson as he slipped through the cottonwoods toward that place where smoke mingled with dusty haze and cattle bawled their protests.

Tim Blythe had cleared away the trees on the creek bank in front of the house and for a space of twenty yards on either hand. Where the cover ended Henderson paused and crouched behind a red willow.

Between the willow branches Henderson could see a goodly part of the corral stockade where it projected beyond the house. And the smoke of the fire was plainly visible above the stockade.

Henderson waited until a sharp, sudden bawl proclaimed the laying on of a hot iron. Then, while the attention of the men in the corral was concentrated on the work in hand, he slipped like a shadow across the open ground and gained the shelter of the house.

He dropped on his knees, crawled rapidly 'round the house on all fours, and hugged the wall at one corner. With all care he poked forth his hatless head and reconnoitered. One of Henderson's winning traits was the faculty of swift and all-embracing observation. Under the circumstances a bare glance was sufficient. He withdrew his head and squatted back on his heels.

He had seen that the gate of the corral was distant not thirty yards, that there were at least a score of cows within the enclosure, and that upon one hog-tied member of the band two men were operating with a heavy iron and a wet blanket. The two men were the Marysville marshal and Mr. Eliphalet Scattergood, the latter well and unfavorably known among his kind as Lafe.

"I wonder if they's any more," pondered Henderson. "I couldn't see only two ponies."

The question was important. Henderson worked his crabwise way to the rear of the house and looked in through a window. There was no one in that room, the kitchen. It was a three-room house. Within sixty seconds Henderson was satisfied that the domicile was untenanted. He returned to the corner from which he had spied upon the dusty gentlemen in the corral, and leaned his rifle against the log wall.

"Just a li'l dirty work now," he thought brightly, "an' everythin'll be hunkydory."

He took off the black and red polka-dotted handkerchief that encircled his neck and flattened it against a log. Then, employing for the purpose his pocket-knife, he jagged out three holes. Two of these holes were on a line, the third some inches below and between them.

The holes completed, Henderson put the handkerchief over his face and head in such a manner that he was enabled to see through the upper holes and breathe through the lower. Holding the handkerchief in place Henderson settled his hat hard down on his head. Experimentally he shook his head. The handkerchief flapped at the bottom, but the hat held the upper part firmly. Henderson next removed his vest, turned it inside out and put it on. After which he pulled off his boots and set them upright beside his rifle.

"I hope they ain't too many stones," he whispered anxiously as he drew his two six-shooters.

"Only three more," observed the marshal to his friend Mr. Scattergood, and tossed a steaming blanket into a pail of water.

"An' that's one —— good thing!" declared Mr. Scattergood, his fingers busily employed in releasing the feet of a cow. "This ain't no job for two men. Which I never worked so hard in my life."

"Keep on an' you'll shore work harder, feller," remarked a genial voice from the corral gate. "I got a picture o' you breakin' stone—that is, if y'ain't lynched previous."

The backs of both men were toward the gate. Neither man budged out of position, nor did he move so much as a finger. The marshal, in the act of scratching a match on his trousers when the voice broke upon his ears, balanced himself on one leg like a crane. The kneeling, back-bent Mr. Scattergood stared dumbly at the cow's hoof between his paralyzed hands.

"That's right," commended the voice cheerily, "hold it an' watch for the pretty bird. A couple o' clicks an' yore picture's took."

The unseen laughed with relish. The marshal swayed slightly. It was the first time he had ever been caught.

"You feller with the match, put yore leg down an' yore hands up," went on the voice. "The other jigger will stand up slow, pushin' his hands out in front of him an' turn my way."

THE marshal and Mr. Scattergood followed their instructions to the letter. The latter, facing the gate, saw a tall citizen, his face masked by a red and black polka-dotted handkerchief, leaning lazily over the bars. The masked individual wore a peculiar-looking vest without buttons, and his two six-shooters bore directly upon Mr. Scattergood and his friend, the marshal.

"The gent lookin' at me will now unbuckle his belt an' let 'er drop," said the unknown. "He won't be hurried about it neither."

Mr. Scattergood's hands set about their task with stiff lack of haste. When his belt and six-shooter were on the ground Mr. Scattergood was ordered to wheel about and put his hands up. With Mr. Scattergood faced to the rear in the posture of a signaler sending the letter U, the tall citizen began on the marshal.

"Turn loose yore belt an' drop her, you other feller," were his words. "Then you can turn 'round, too, first puttin' up yore hands."

The marshal obeyed quite as meticulously as had Mr. Scattergood.

"You ain't wearin' no star on that vest," complained the tall citizen. "Ain't you got no star?"

"No!" yapped the badgered marshal.

"That's shore tough. I was hopin' you had one. I'm makin' a collection o' stars. Don'tcha think now, if yuh tried real hard, yuh could maybe dig up a li'l star out o' yore pockets—usin' one hand, o' course?"

"No!" barked the marshal.

"Don't yell. Yuh hurt my feelin's when yuh do. An' my feelin's 'll shore be damaged if you don't gimme a star. Yuh won't do no such thing, huh? I'm sorry."

Bang! Smack! The tall citizen's off-gun spat flame and smoke. A bullet cut the ground between the marshal's feet.

"Turn yore right foot slanchways, feller," requested the tall citizen. "I'm gonna shoot off yore boot-heel. Is yore ankle insured? With my feelin's all tore up an' jangled thisaway I might shoot high or somethin'."

"Don't shoot!" begged the marshal. "I'll get it."

He slowly lowered his right arm, produced from an upper vest-pocket an object that glittered and held it out at arm's length.

"Drop her on yore belt. That's the boy. Now, both o' yuh come over here quick!"

Mr. Scattergood and the marshal frantically rushed the gate.

"'Taint necessary to climb over," drawled the unknown, backing away. "They was a couple o' cows gonna drift in between us an' I didn't wanna lose sight o' yuh. You might 'a' felt like gamblin' with me. Ain't it amazin'," he added in his pleasant voice," how easy yuh can change the Lazy T into the Barred Box?"

The two worthies behind the gate glowered. The marshal spat upon the dusty earth.

"I s'pose yuh was figurin' on drivin' over to the Dry Mountains," went on the tall citizen, "an' sellin' 'em for beef to the miner folks. Was that the idea? Don't say nothin' if yuh don't wanna. I'm a good guesser. Twenty-two cows in here. That leaves twenty out on the range. Have yuh blotted their brands yet? Well, it don't matter. It's none o' my business. I'm only a poor lonesome road-agent, but I never robbed no women yet. Yo're a couple o' skunks, ain'tcha? They ain't nothin' worse'n a skunk, is they—'cept you two gents? Yo're so low down a rattlesnake sticks up over yuh like a freight-wagon over a couple o' toads."

"You go to ——!" snarled Mr. Scattergood.

"Before I do," said their unruffled captor, "s'pose you go over an' get yore two ponies. Get the one that's still holdin' the cow first. An' don't go foolin' for no Winchester while yo're lettin' loose that rope, an' don't dodge behind no cow."

Mr. Scattergood did as he was told. When he returned, leading the two ponies, the marshal was ordered to open the gate.

"C'mon out now," directed the unknown. "Yuh might swing the gate shut again, you. The coyote holdin' the hosses will tie 'em to the top rail. The other polecat will walk out into the clear about forty steps an' stop without turnin' 'round. Drift, an' drift quick! Through with them ponies? All right. You trot out after yore friend an' kick him in the pants."

Which fantastic order caused the marshal to half-turn and Mr. Scattergood to stare in slack-jawed amazement.

"Yuh heard what I said," the tall citizen drawled. "Fly at it. I ain't searched you fellers for hide-outs, so I'm takin' a chance. But I'll keep my peepers open, don'tcha fret. Get a-goin', you hop-toad, get a-goin'. An' kick him good so's I can hear it."

One of the unknown's two guns cracked as he spoke. Mr. Scattergood's hat twitched and two round holes appeared in the high crown.

"Start, I'm tellin' yuh," continued the tall citizen, "or will I have to part yore hair?"

Thus adjured and encouraged Mr. Scattergood did not linger. He walked right out, swung his leg and dealt the marshal a sincere and hearty kick. The marshal grunted and shuffled his feet.

"Now, Marshal," whooped the tall citizen, "whatcha gonna do? Gonna take it lyin' down? G'wan! Hit him! Whang him good! I'm tellin' yuh to! Show me a fight, you two gents!"

The stung marshal whirled on his toes and pasted Mr. Scattergood squarely on the nose. Not to be outdone, Mr. Scattergood jolted the marshal in the stomach. The marshal bored in with flailing arms. Mr. Scattergood met him less than halfway and closed the official left eye. The marshal, running true to form, descended to the low tactics of the hoodlum and kicked Mr. Scattergood in the shins. Snarling with rage Mr. Scattergood swung his right to the marshal's mouth and repeated with his left.

Spitting blood and teeth the marshal closed with his companion in misery and endeavored to choke him. Mr. Scattergood contrived to grip a double handful of the marshal's hair. Mr. Scattergood ripped and tore. The marshal, suffering the most exquisite pain, strove to gouge Mr. Scattergood, but only succeeded in removing a three-inch strip of skin from above Mr. Scattergood's left eyebrow.

Mr. Scattergood hooked his heel behind the marshal's leg. Both men fell to the ground, the marshal underneath. In the fall the marshal's hair was wrenched free. Incidentally some of it was wrenched out. Promptly the marshal wound both arms 'round the neck of Mr. Scattergood and twisted his own body to one side. The tangled pair flopped over with a jerk. Mr. Scattergood was now underneath.

The marshal drove his knee into the solar plexus of Mr. Scattergood. The latter went limp with a wheeze. Kneeling upon the senseless form of Mr. Scattergood, the victorious marshal, out of his one serviceable eye, looked about him for a rock with which to further dent the features of his comrade. An ancient friendship had indeed been shattered.

At this juncture long fingers inserted themselves between the collar of the marshal and his neck. He was yanked backward and flung down in a huddle. He sat up, acutely conscious that he ached in all parts of him, and waggled an abraded chin. The masked citizen, sitting back on his heels a few yards away, surveyed the puffed and battered countenance of the marshal.

"I ain't got no kick comin' a-tall," said the unknown. "I dunno when I've seen a better fight. You fellers done well, —— well. I didn't think yuh had it in yuh, honest I didn't. Yuh needn't go to get up after yore hat now. Just sit still till yore friend pulls 'round. He'll be all right in a shake. He's breathin' better already."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BARGAIN

THE tall citizen shepherded the two staggering men to their horses.

"I've took the rifles off o' yore saddles so's yuh won't be tempted," he said. "Now," he went on, when they had made their very clumsy mounts, "start off slow—no, this way. I wanna be able to watch yuh while I'm pullin' on my boots. After yuh get across Calf Creek, head east for them hills. She's five miles across that flat. An' I'd go straight across if I was you. I've got a cayuse cached 'round here, an' I might come after yuh an' show yuh the way if yuh forget an' drift north or south. After yuh get to the hills I don't give a —— whatcha do. I'm goin' some'ers else myself pretty prompt. I hear this country ain't healthy for road-agents—or brand-blotters."

The two thoroughly chastened men made no remark. They rode down to the creek, splashed across, and headed toward the distant hills. The tall citizen, pulling on his boots, watched them go. Not till they were three hundred yards away did he remove his handkerchief mask. He knotted it 'round his neck, turned his vest, and built himself a cigaret.

"I'm bettin' them two jiggers will be in Marysville tomorrow," Henderson said aloud. "Yessir, I'm shore gamblin' on that. An' they won't be expectin' to meet no road-agent neither."

He went into the corral, took from the pail the soaked blanket and wrung it out. He retrieved the marshal's star and put it in an inside vest-pocket. He up-ended the pail over the fire and gathered up the belts with their dangling six-shooters and the heavy running-iron used by the men in their brand-blotting, and dumped the articles into the blanket. He folded the blanket over and over till he had a compact bundle.

He dropped the bundle beside his Winchester and picked up the rifles he had taken from the two men. He scouted 'round the house till he found a small opening between a foundation log and the ground. Through this opening he shoved the rifles one after the other at the full stretch of his arm. He threw several handfuls of earth into the opening, and tamped with a vigorous boot-toe.

"Them rifles may not be needed," he reflected, "but a extra ace in a deal like this ain't to be sneezed at."

He returned to the front of the house and gazed across the flats. The retreating figures of the marshal and Mr. Scattergood were dots in the distance. They were keeping a remarkably straight course.

"Guess I'll get the li'l hoss," said Henderson, "so's I can turn loose these cows. No use waitin' no longer."

He picked up the blanket bundle and his rifle and walked swiftly back to his horse. He awakened the dozing animal, tied the bundle into his slicker, swung up and trotted to the corral. He opened the gate without dismounting and rode in. He drove out every cow. Whirling a doubled rope and yelling at the top of his lungs he drove those cows west and north. He spent an active hour, and when he ceased to shout and spur the cattle were scattered in the draws and hollows of a region several miles square.

"Nothin' like scatterin' the evidence where they won't find it in a hurry, is they?" he inquired of the horse. "C'mon, feller, we'll go back to the creek an' give yuh one fine li'l drink, an' then me'n you'll sift along to Marysville."

The stars were out when Henderson rode his tired horse into Marysville. He dismounted in front of Judge Allison's house. The judge was standing on the porch. Henderson could see the white gleam of his shirt-sleeves.

"It's me, Judge," he said, stepping upon the porch, "Bill Henderson."

"With the accent on the Henderson," whispered the judge, gripping his hand warmly. "I'll have Black Sam attend to your horse. You'll stay with me, of course."

"It might look better if I stayed at the hotel, Judge," said Henderson softly.

"So that's it. I might have known. You'll eat with me, though. I shan't take 'No' on that."

"Well, I've always liked yore grub, Judge. I'll be right back soon's I go to the hotel an' get me a bed an' see the li'l hoss fed. I got a small pack here I'd like to leave with yuh, an' I wouldn't want for nobody to see it."

"I'll put it in the sideboard where I keep my whisky. The doors are always locked. This it?"

Henderson handed the blanket bundle to the judge.

"Kind o' damp an' heavy," he cautioned, and returned to his waiting horse.

He left his mount at the hotel corral, bespoke horse-feed, and made good his claim to a bed by the simple method of piling his war-bags on an unoccupied cot.

As he passed through the barroom on his way to the street a man entered. It was Dunlavy, the Wells Fargo agent.

"When's Sam Bellows comin' back?" Dunlavy asked the bartender.

"I dunno," replied the bartender.

Henderson sat down on a chair, and slowly rolled a cigaret.

"Didn't he say?" persisted Dunlavy.

"If he had I'd tell yuh. Sam drifted, an' I dunno even where."

"Well, they's a saddle, bridle, spurs, an' a pair o' Angora chaps—leastwise that's what the bill says—in the office for him. Come in on the stage today from Pueblo, Colorado."

"Blazier's, huh?"

"Yes, an' the bill says 'collect,' an' I'd like to."

"Yuh needn't look at me thataway," grinned the bartender, swabbing off the bar. "Yuh won't do no collectin' here."

Dunlavy departed swearing. Henderson smoked his cigaret to the butt, bought some cigars for his friend, the judge, and went out into the street and walked unhurriedly to the latter's house.

"Judge," said Henderson, when Black Sam had served the supper, and the kitchen door was shut, "I might want to ask a favor of yuh tomorrow."

"Say when," smiled the judge.

"I might ask a couple o' fellers in here so's I can talk to 'em private-like."

"The house is yours." Judge Allison waved a plump and hospitable hand.

"I'm obliged. I might be needin' the key to that sideboard, too."

"Here's a duplicate," said the judge, detaching a key from a clinking bunch and tossing it across the table.

"An' this ain't all," went on Henderson, pocketing the key. "I'd sort o' like yuh to be in yore office across the hall while I'm talkin' to them fellers. I might wanna ask yore advice."

The judge cocked a heavy eyebrow and tapped the dull butt of one of two six-shooters in shoulder-holsters that cuddled his ribs beneath his armpits.

"No." Henderson shook his head and dropped an eyelid. "Legal advice."

"Sometimes I wish I was not a judge," grieved the jurist, "or that Justice was not supposed to be blind. Are you planning anything illegal? Never mind," he added hastily. "Don't tell me. I'd rather not know. But if you have in view a smoky session, wouldn't the corral do as well? I dislike to seem discourteous or lacking in hospitality, but—I rather value the mirror in my sideboard."

"I'm gamblin' they won't be no smoke," Henderson assured him. "Leastwise not if I can help it."

"I know you'll do your best, Bill. Have some more coffee? No? Well then, have a drink. That whisky came to me from Louisville a month ago. It's thirty years old, smooth as honey and mellow as a ripe Sheepnose."

"Thank you, I will have a little nip."

Later in the evening Henderson and the judge strolled into the Bound-to-Come Saloon, whose enterprising proprietor, keen to provide the honest dollar with other than a liquid outlet, ran games in the back room.

The judge inserted his ample bulk in a game of stud.

Henderson did not play. He moved aimlessly about, when he wasn't talking to the bartender, and drifted into the street before eleven o'clock.

From the Bound-to-Come he went to the Thanksgiving, where likewise men could drink or play cards as the spirit moved them. Here again Henderson did not pick up a hand, and here again he held casual converse with the bartender.

Before midnight was thirty minutes old Henderson was asleep on his cot at the hotel.

IN THE morning he repaired to the office of the judge and borrowed paper, pen and ink. He consumed the better part of an hour in filling several sheets of legal cap with spacious handwriting.

He read through his completed work with care, decided that he had been sufficiently specific, and made two meticulous copies. Which being done he signed the lot, placed original and copies in three separate envelopes and handed them to the judge.

"If I ain't back by ten o'clock," said Henderson, "or if anythin' happens to me before, yuh might open one o' them envelopes an' read what's inside."

"Right," smiled Judge Allison, and pigeon-holed the envelopes.

From the judge's house Henderson went to the general store of Mr. Eliphalet Scattergood. The owner was assisting his clerk in the unpacking of sundry cases of "airtights." Mr. Scattergood looked much the worse for wear. He had changed his clothes, but the appearance of his face and the cramped manner in which he moved his arms and legs would have led any one without knowledge of the facts into the belief that a mule, or other equally muscular animal, had assaulted Mr. Scattergood with intent to kill.

Henderson bought tobacco and was waited upon by the clerk. Henderson went away in search of the marshal. That gentleman was found in his office. He too had changed his clothes. He too had certainly been engaged in desperate conflict. To manifest the slightest curiosity concerning the troubles of other men is tabu in cowland circles. Henderson gazed without interest upon the marshal's beaten countenance.

"Mornin', Marshal," was Henderson's greeting, uttered in a harsh, hoarse tone. "Wanna sell some cows—three-year olds?"

"Sell 'em if I get my price," the marshal grunted sourly.

"Maybe now we can get together on the price—if she ain't too steep."

"How many djuh want?"

"Depends on the price. Listen here, I ain't even got time to ride out to yore ranch an' inspect any cattle. You'll have to drive—in here, an' the judge'll look 'em over for me. He knows cows an' he's a friend o' mine. Le's go down to his place an' fix it up."

The marshal nodded, stood up stiffly and tenderly, and stiffly and tenderly buckled on his six-shooter. The gun had seen service, but the holster and the cartridge-belt were brand new.

When the two came in sight of Judge Allison's house the jurist was sitting on the front porch. A weighty calf-bound volume lay open across the judicial knees. He gave them an abstracted "Good morning" as they drew near and went on with his reading.

"About the cattle deal yo're gonna help me with, Judge," said Henderson, not forgetting to speak hoarsely and harshly. "Can we use yore dinin'-room till we get the price settled?"

"By all means, Bill. Make yourselves at home." The judge wondered where Henderson had picked up that sudden cold.

"We might want yuh to help us out later, Judge—if yo're 'round."

"I'll be in my office when you want me. I've three hours' work ahead on a most interesting case, so take your time."

The judge ushered them into the dining-room, and crossed the hall to his office and closed the door. Henderson closed the dining-room door. In through the open side-windows, from the direction of the corral, floated the trilling lilt of Black Sam's whistle making melody of "Beulah Land." There was no danger of that which Henderson intended saying to the marshal being overheard.

The marshal let himself carefully down upon a chair. Henderson took a key from his pocket. The marshal glanced at the key, then rapidly and unbelievingly winked his one available eye. For Henderson's other hand held a gun, and the round muzzle of the gun gaped across the table at the marshal's chest.

"Put yore hands on the table, Marshal," Henderson requested in his natural tone of voice.

The marshal slowly spread his hands flat on the table. He licked his tongue catwise over his dry and puffy lips.

"By Gawd!" he whispered. "By Gawd!"

"Yo're rememberin' the lonesome road-agent, huh?" Henderson queried cheerfully.

The marshal's face was expressionless. Henderson, without losing for an instant the magic of the drop, backed to the sideboard, slid the hand holding the key behind him and opened the sideboard door. He crouched, searched within a moment, and straightened. In his hand he held a heavy blanket bundle.

He laid the bundle on the table. The ironmongery within chinked suggestively.

"Yore guns an' the runnin'-iron are in here," Henderson said softly. "Yore star's in my pocket."

The marshal remained dumb.

"Yore rifles—yores an Lafe's—are cached some'ers near the Blythe ranch," went on Henderson. "I dunno as I wanna buy no cows—now. But I guess maybe you do."

"Whadda you mean?" grated the marshal.

"I mean yo're gonna have a chance—a chance no rustler ever got before. But I'm figuring yo're worth more alive than yuh would be lynched. I gotcha fannin' yore ears on a pin, Marshal. Here's all the evidence, except the rifles, an' I seen what I seen, an' I guess a jury'd believe it—knowin' me."

"I thought yore face was familiar!" came the husky whisper. "Yo're Bill——"

"Nemmine about no names," Henderson interrupted swiftly. "Yuh know me now, an' so you be happy. Yuh've learned somethin', an' here's the rest o' the lesson. When a certain lady tried to sell her cattle here yuh didn't wanna buy, an' yuh stopped Lafe Scattergood from buyin'. Yore blister of a mind had a better idea. When this lady needed protection from Sam Bellows yuh didn't have no help handy. Like the sneakin' hound yuh are yuh let Sam hell 'round all he liked. I tell yuh plain, Marshal, if I wasn't thinkin' o' the interests of the lady, I'd wring yore —— neck.

"What yo're gonna do, you an' Lafe Scattergood, is buy her cows, her hosses an' her ranch. The ranch ain't been proved up on, so I'll ask the lady to sign a quit-claim along with the bill o' sale. Also, feller, if Miss Blythe changes her mind an' wants the ranch back you'll let her have it, you an' Lafe will, without makin' no yowl about it. But I'm bettin' she won't want it back, 'cept maybe the fixin's inside. You'll take good care o' them fixin's till she sends for 'em. I'm forgettin' to say that when yuh do these li'l things my mouth is shut. Nobody'll know what happened yest'day at the Lazy T 'cept me an' you an' Lafe. You can go on bein' marshal, an' Lafe can go on keepin' store.

"But you an' him gotta travel a heap

straight. That's part o' the proposition, too. If you go makin' bad medicine, you fellers, the deal's off. Yore good eye is brightenin' up. Yo're thinkin' o' somethin', huh? Yo're thinkin' maybe if I'm rubbed out yuh'd be safe. Yeah, is that it? Well, I'll just snub up that notion sudden an' short. I've wrote out everythin' that happened yest'day an' made two copies. Them two copies will be planted in two national banks where I know the cashiers, an' this bundle an' yore star goes with one of 'em. The original will go some'ers else. All three will carry instructions on their envelopes sayin' how they're to be opened an' read if I'm wiped out, and destroyed unread only in case I die of old age or a real shore-'nough sickness. See? The longer I live unshot the longer you'll be happy."

"S'pose—s'pose yo're killed an' we don't have nothin' to do with it?"

"Then you an' Lafe better straddle yore fastest cayuses an' punch the breeze."

"But——"

"They ain't no 'buts,' not one li'l, li'l 'but.' Yo're out on a limb, Marshal. Yuh gotta drop."

"Yo're blackmailin', by Gawd!"

The marshal's guttural snarl was as defiant as the man could make it, but a clammy sweat was on his forehead, and the chilly talons of a sickening fear clutched at his evil soul. He had money, had the marshal. He had a standing. He had been caught. Shame new-born pounced down and made holiday with Fear. In the conception of which shame conscience had no part. It was shame at being found out, at being helpless before a better man—the bitter shame the sinful know when Nemesis lays them by the heels.

The marshal's lips writhed apart. He showed his teeth. He panted at the calm citizen behind the gun.

"Yo're blackmailin'," he repeated. "Yo're blackmailin'."

"Aw right," said Henderson. "I'll just call in Judge Allison, tell him what I know, an' show him what's in the blanket, likewise yore star. Then a posse will ride over to the Blythe ranch an' search out them two Winchesters. Between them rifles an' the brand-blotched cattle I throwed out on the range, an' all the rest of it, you an' Lafe had oughta get ten years apiece—if yuh ain't lynched first."

"Maybe Lafe won't agree," the marshal suggested faintly.

"You got fifteen minutes to persuade him," said Henderson briskly. "If you'n him ain't here inside one li'l quarter-hour I'm gonna blat."

"How'd I know you'll keep yore word?" chattered the marshal.

"I'm hard o' hearin' today. But I thought you said, 'How'd I know you'll keep yore word?' Didja?"

"I did not. I'm—I'm goin' now."

"Wait a shake. I wanna show you somethin' first. Le's go in the judge's office, you an' me."

Henderson hooked an affectionate arm in the crook of the marshal's elbow. But the officer was not deceived. He could feel the hard muzzle of the six-shooter nudging his ribs. Arm in arm the two entered the judge's office. Judge Allison, overflowing a tip-tilted chair, his feet on the window-sill, was enjoying a cigar and reading the calf-bound volume.

"Can I use yore desk a minute, Judge?" said Henderson, skilfully concealing the six-shooter under the flap of his vest.

"Certainly," replied Judge Allison, without turning his head.

HENDERSON seated the marshal before the desk. From a pigeon-hole he took the three envelopes, opened them, and flattened the contents on the desk beneath the marshal's eyes.

"Read and sign," Henderson whispered tactfully in the marshal's ear. "They's the pen yonder."

The marshal read with emotion—emotion that was nauseating. His body shook a little. The six-shooter tentatively poked him in the ribs.

"They's the pen," reminded Henderson.

At that moment, in the marshal's opinion, Henderson was the very devil indeed. And Judge Allison within ten feet! The trap had been fairly sprung. The marshal coughed to conceal a groan and stretched forth a hand to grasp the pen.

When the three papers had each been signed Henderson replaced them in their envelopes, returned the envelopes to the pigeon-hole, and took the marshal back into the dining-room and closed the door.

"I thought maybe yuh'd feel more like persuadin' Lafe if you signed first," Henderson explained brightly, grinning at the marshal.

Words failed the marshal. His knees felt strangely weak. Nevertheless he managed to effect a conventional, if somewhat hurried, withdrawal.

The judge stared wonderingly out of the window. He thought of the marshal's bruised face, the scratching of a hurrying pen and the speedy fashion of the man's packing off.

"This is interesting," mused Judge Allison. "Very interesting. I wonder what it's all about."

Within twelve minutes from the time of his exit the marshal returned. With him came Mr. Scattergood. There was fear in the expression of Mr. Scattergood. Henderson, in the dining-room, perceived that fear. The judge, looking through his window, saw eye to eye with Henderson.

"Damnation," murmured the judge, who was but human. "Bill's using me for his own fell purposes and won't tell me a word. Damnation."

"C'mon in," invited Henderson, as the marshal and Mr. Scattergood hesitated on the porch.

They entered, Mr. Scattergood with diffidence, and the marshal kicked the door shut with a bang. Mr. Scattergood started nervously. Henderson smiled. He had not drawn his gun, but his washed-out gray eyes were alert as a hungry tiger's.

"Might as well sit down," he suggested civilly.

They sat with much scraping of chair legs. The marshal gazed sulkily at Henderson. Mr. Scattergood stared in sullen fascination at the blanket bundle on the table. Henderson leaned back against the sideboard. One thumb was caught in his belt. The other, the left, was thrust into the waistband of his trousers.

"About them cattle," he began bruskly, "the price o' them cows'll be five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars for forty cows!" exclaimed the marshal, gaping in amaze.

Mr. Scattergood rubbed a worried hand across his gulping throat.

"Forty-two cows," corrected Henderson. "All good an' fat, Lazy T an' Barred Box brands."

"I ain't got that much money," denied Mr. Scattergood.

"Only twenty-five hundred from you," explained Henderson. "The marshal takes the other half."

"I ain't got no twenty-five hundred," lamented the marshal.

"Me neither," chimed in Mr. Scattergood.

"That is tough," commiserated Henderson. "I suppose I'll have to tell the judge after all."

"Maybe—maybe I can borrow it," surrendered the marshal.

"I dunno where I can get it," Mr. Scattergood affirmed faintly.

"I'd scratch my head an' think," advised Henderson. "You two chunkers make me sick! Yuh got money, both of you! Don't try to tell me different! Marshal, with yore ranch an' all yo're worth twenty thousand easy. An' Lafe, if you can't dig up thirty thousand I'll eat my hoss. I want a thousand apiece in cash, an' I'll take yore checks on the First National in Piegan City, where I know yuh got accounts, for the rest."

"Yuh ain't got no power of attorney," protested Mr. Scattergood.

"Yo're a helluva gent to yap about power of attorney! I didn't notice no power of attorney when you an' yore friend was blottin' them cows. Not only will yuh gimme that two thousand an' write them checks, makin' 'em payable to Miss Joy Blythe, but yo're gonna write a letter, each o' yuh, to the First National's cashier tellin' him to place the three thousand to Miss Blythe's account an' write her a registered letter at Farewell sayin' it's been done. Allowin' for delays, if the lady don't hear from the First National inside o' seven days Ill take it yo're not keepin' yore side o' the bargain an' act accordin'. See how easy I've fixed it for yuh. All yuh gotta do is take yore pen in hand."

He looked expectantly at the two rogues.

The two rogues looked each upon the other, and there was no affection in their eyes. They turned their faces toward Henderson and slowly nodded their wretched heads.

"That's the ticket," Henderson said warmly. "The judge has a First National check-book. We'll go right in his office where they's plenty to write with. An' while we're in there Lafe will spread his name on them three li'l reports o' mine."

And Lafe did.

CHAPTER XV

HOT IRON

FROM Marysville Henderson, two thousand dollars in gold tied up in the slicker behind his cantle, rode north. He did not push his horse, and he traveled by way of the Bar S line camp on Packsaddle Creek and the 88 ranch-house.

He remained a day and a night at the latter place, and spent a great deal of time in conversation with his friend Tom Dowling and Lanpher, the grumpy manager.

He learned, among other bits of more important information, that Mr. Simms was resting easily in the manager's own bed and bade fair to make a good recovery. He did not visit Mr. Simms. He felt that, under the circumstances, such procedure would be indelicate.

The miles between the 88 and Farewell were covered without incident. The hotel guests were at dinner when Henderson dismounted at the corral. He could hear the clinking of knives and forks and scraps of conversation. He heard Chuck's voice and Miss Blythe's low laugh, and he smiled.

"Guess Sam's been a good boy," was his thought as he went to the kitchen door after stripping off saddle and bridle and turning his horse into the corral.

"Howdy, Mis' Lainey," he said taking off his hat to the angular woman busy at the range. "Guess I'll eat out here if yuh'll sling some beans an' beef on a plate an' gimme a cup o' coffee."

"Why, shore," smiled Mrs. Lainey, ever appreciative of courtesy she received but seldom. "I was wonderin' when you'd be back. They's the basin an' soap on the bench. Water's in the pail underneath. I'll get you a clean towel."

"After supper," he said, when she handed him the food, "I wish yuh'd ask Miss Blythe to come out here to the corral."

He sat down facing his saddle on the log near the corral gate and ate his supper. The meal finished and cup and dish returned to Mrs. Lainey, he returned to the log and rolled a satisfied cigaret. His eyes strayed to the bulgy slicker on the saddle.

"That ought to help a li'l bit," he told himself. "With that an' the money in the Piegan City bank she can go 'way an' do what she wants."

The half-smile faded. The stubby mustache straightened. His face became serious. He rested his elbows on his knees and surveyed the smoke spiraling upward from the glowing tip of his cigaret. He knew that he did not wish Miss Blythe to go away. And by his own carefully-planned actions he had made it possible for her to do that very thing. He had not previously considered the matter in this light.

She would certainly go away—Denver, Chicago, or some other equally impossible place. That every week she remained in Farewell was costing him an amount proportionate to half the monthly wages of a good puncher troubled him not at all. He would cheerfully have gone on paying down till the end of time.

He dropped the cigaret and ground it into the earth with the sole of his boot and swore gently. Then he sprang up and removed his hat, for Miss Blythe was coming out of the kitchen door.

"Yo're lookin' better," he informed her, when he had shaken hands and was sitting beside her on the log.

"Am I?"

She lifted grave, dark eyes in a swift glance and dropped them again.

"Shore. Yuh—yuh don't look scared o' nothin' now."

"Perhaps I'm not any more," she said in a low voice.

"Bellows still here?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"Has he done what I told him?"

"He surely has. I don't think he'll ever bother me again."

"We'll hope so—on his account. I stopped at yore ranch, ma'am, while I was away, an' I sold yore cattle."

"You sold my cattle!" she repeated, eyes wide with amazement.

"I know it was kind o' nervy, but I seen a good chance, so I done it. I sold the ranch too."

Miss Blythe gasped.

"Would you mind repeating that?" she asked when she could speak.

"I sold yore ranch an' yore cattle, ma'am. I know it was nervy like I say, but yuh told me you wanted to sell 'em, so I done it. I'm sorry if yo're mad. But I can fix it up so's yuh can have everythin' back, an——"

"I'm not mad. I'm glad—glad. But how did you manage it, when the claim hasn't been proved up?"

"Oh, the fellers are gonna put a jigger on it to hold her down an' prove up for 'em, I guess. But that don't matter. Inside the slicker on my saddle is two thousand dollars an' a bill o' sale an' a quit-claim deed for you to sign."

"Two thousand dollars!"

"Two thousand in the slicker, an' three thousand more to yore account in the First National Bank at Piegan City. Yuh'll be notified in two — three days now. If yuh ain't, lemme know."

"But—but—why, that's five thousand dollars!"

"Yore 'rithmetic's fine, ma'am."

"The claim and the cows can't be worth all that."

"Oh, yes, they are. I dunno but what them fellers would 'a' paid more. They was a heap anxious to buy—a heap anxious."

"Who are they?"

"The Marysville marshal an' Lafe Scattergood," he told her. "Yeah, yeah, I know," he added hastily, "they might not 'a' wanted to buy one time, but they changed their minds when they seen how good the claim an' the cows was. I talked it up to 'em best I knowed, an' they just couldn't help but buy."

She looked at him, a slight frown between her curving eyebrows.

"You mean to say those two men paid five thousand dollars for forty-two cows and a quarter-section."

She crossed her knees, clasped her hands in her lap, and cocked a skeptical head at him.

"They was two hosses—three hosses—besides. The one you rode will likely drift back some time."

"Oh, nonsense, Mister Henderson. Do be serious."

"I am. Don'tcha go frettin' over this deal, ma'am. The marshal an' Lafe figured they was gettin' it cheap. I dunno but what they thought they was gold in them hills."

"No one's ever found any west of the Dry Mountains. My brother told me."

"You never can tell, not in this country. So if yo're satisfied with what I done I'll give you the money in the slicker an' get it off my hands."

THE LEANED sidewise and began to unfasten the knots in the saddle-strings. She promptly seized his elbow with both hands and pulled him upright.

"You take care of it," she implored. "I wouldn't know what to do with it."

"Yuh could go 'way like yuh told me yuh wanted."

He stared down at her anxiously.

"I guess I don't want to go away as much as I did. I'm getting to know people here, and—and everybody's so friendly and nice to me. I like keeping store. Maybe Mister Flynn would let me buy a half-interest. Do you think he would?"

"I guess maybe. But I can't keep this money. She'd ought to be in a bank some'ers. Tell yuh what. I'll give her to 'Buck' Saylor to put in the Wells Fargo safe. Buck he sleeps right in the office with two dogs. They ain't nobody gonna get gay with the express company's money while Buck's in there."

"Yes, do that. That'll be fine. But—but must you do it right away? You're awfully provoking, Mister Henderson. You keep doing the most wonderful things for me and then you rush off without saying two words to me. Can't you stay and talk to me a little while? I'm lonely."

She looked at him wistfully.

When a pretty girl looks at you wistfully and tells you she's lonely there is but one thing to do. Quite so.

At nine o'clock Mr. Lainey wandered out into the dark kitchen and bumped into his wife who was sitting on a chair gazing fixedly out of the window.

"Look where yo're goin', yuh overgrown punkin!" she ordered him fiercely. "Keep quiet!"

"Whatsa matter?" he asked bewilderedly.

"Bill Henderson an' Joy Blythe are a-settin' out on that log by the corral gate. They been settin' there since after supper, an' he ain't kissed her yet. I'm waitin' till he does."

"Maybe he don't wanna kiss her," suggested Mrs. Lainey's husband.

"Yo're a fool, Bill Lainey. Who wouldn't wanna kiss her sweet face?"

"I don't."

"Lemme catch yuh. Just lemme once. I wish they wasn't so far off. I'd like to hear what they're sayin'."

"Well, they are, an' yuh can't, an' I wanna cup o' coffee. Where's the lamp?"

The romance-hungry Mrs. Lainey arose and felt in the corner for the broom. But her husband fled before she found it. She returned to her observation post in time to see Henderson and Miss Blythe walking streetward.

Ten minutes later Henderson left Miss Blythe at the door of the hotel. Miss Blythe, Buck Saylor's receipt snug and warm in the bosom of her gown, went to her room. Henderson started systematically to find Chuck Morgan.

He found him, after a search of half an hour, sitting on the counter of the Blue Pigeon listening raptly while Mike Flynn held forth on life as it is lived by the natives of the South Sea Islands.

"Is that all they wear?" Chuck was asking at the moment of Henderson's entrance.

"Shore, not another stitch," Mike replied. "Add a war-club for the min, or maybe a trade-knife, an' yuh have their complate costume. There ain't—here's Bill! H'are yuh, stranger?"

"Howdy, Mike. Howdy, Chuck. How long yuh been broke, Chuck?"

He sat down beside the puncher and, under cover of Chuck's wing chaps, heavily rammed his friend with a strong and stiffened thumb.

"Broke!" repeated Chuck. "Meanin' how?"

"Well, I looked in all the saloons for yuh, an' nobody'd seen yuh since noon, so, knowin' you, I knowed yuh must be broke!"

"Is that so? Is that so? I ain't sayin' a word about present company, but when the barkeep sees me comin' he don't trot out no pail. Nawsir, I ain't no human sponge. I'm a moral man, I am, but if yo're gonna slide an' go splash I'll trail along an' pull yuh out."

Chuck slid off the counter with a jingling thud of spurred heels.

Once in the street Henderson turned in the direction of the Canton. Chuck took the outside edge of the sidewalk.

"Yo're punchin' me with yore thumb thataway wasn't no accident," said Chuck in a low voice. "What's up?"

"Lots—I hope. Just now I gotta talk with Sing Luey. He's in the Canton alone. I seen him when I come by. If he's still alone you'n me'll go in an' borrow matches so she'll look natural from the street. I gotta talk to Sing Luey private—just you'n me. See?"

The Canton was empty of guests. Sing Luey, a lamp on the table at his elbow, sat hump-shouldered on a stool and sucked his long, silver-mounted pipe. He rose as they entered and bowed gravely.

"Wanna borrow a match, Sing Luey," Henderson announced in a loud tone. Then, in a whisper, his lips barely moving, he added: "I gotta talk to yuh. Send yore cook in here, an' let us in at the back door."

Sing Luey's inscrutable face did not move a muscle.

"Here are matches," he said. "For the rest, you shall have what you desire in five minutes."

The two departed. In exactly five minutes, no more, no less, Sing Luey opened the kitchen door to Henderson and Chuck Morgan.

AN HOUR later the door opened and the two white men, stumbling a little in the darkness, issued and tiptoed their cautious way to the rear of Kennedy's stable. There they sat them down and made cigarets.

"I'm bettin' it'll work," observed Chuck, with his thumbnail scratching a match alight inside his hat.

"If it don't, they's other ways," said Henderson. "Pinch her out. I'll light up from yore pill."

"The Rainbow oughta sift in tomorrow," remarked Chuck, proffering his cigaret.

"She ought," Henderson said, leaning forward to get a light. "How's Sam been actin' since I left yuh?" he asked between draws.

"Spendin' most o' his time in the dance-hall an' his money in the Happy Heart buckin' Longhorn's games."

"Irrigate much?"

"Enough to bloat a cow. But it never affects him none so's yuh can notice it."

"I wish he would get drunk. He'd pry things loose then, an' a feller'd know what to do. But these here quiet devils are hellions to put yore finger on."

"It'll come to a show-down some day."

"Yo're whistlin', but I've got business, Chuck," complained the fretful Henderson. "I can't lay 'round here till I grow roots like a cottonwood waitin' for him to make his play. An' I ain't gonna, y'betcha. Le's go over to the dance-hall. Maybe Sam's there."

"Yo're on the prod tonight."

"Never think it," Henderson denied, mindful of his promise to Miss Blythe. "I ain't lookin' for no fight whatever. It ain't exactly out of my way to go over to the dance-hall neither. I'm just gonna browse 'round an' be sociable. If Sam is huntin' trouble an' searches me out I gotta defend myself, don't I? What could be fairer than that, huh?"

Henderson's manner and tone were so earnest that Chuck was mystified.

"Why, shore, shore," said he. "Why not? Whatcha askin' me for?"

Henderson stood up and scratched his head.

"I dunno," he said truthfully. "C'mon."

They entered the Dewdrop and gravitated to the bar, taking their places at the end near the street door as behooved gentlemen unpopular with the management. The bartender served them in silence. Cupping their left hands 'round their glasses they slouched sidewise against the wood and surveyed the scene of what men in their blindness miscall gaiety.

The Dewdrop was as busy as a church fair. The barkeeper was not idle a moment, nor were the customers. Two of the latter had, early in the evening as it was, gone down into the pit whence they had been digged, and were sleeping the sleep of the drunken on the floor against the wall, where they would be reasonably safe from careless feet.

The five women were earning their wages quite literally by the sweat of their brows. Dancing on a hot night ceases to be a form of recreation—if it ever was for them—and becomes an exercise. The perspiration trickled down their faces and made little channels in the powder and the paint. But their hard eyes gleamed brightly as ever in the lamplight and their carmined lips tossed Rabelaisian quips at favored friends with unabated vigor.

Upon a window sill Sam Bellows sat alone. Beyond a quick glance of recognition as Henderson entered he paid the latter no attention. There were other men leaning against walls and sitting on tip-tilted chairs. In places they were shoulder to shoulder, but there was a space of several feet on Sam Bellows' either hand. Which was natural. Men that hold life lightly and take it in the same manner are not beings with whom one can feel wholly at ease.

The fiddler on his table cut short "La Paloma" without the customary flourish and wiped his dripping chin.

"Hot, ain't it?" he said to Kansas Casey, who was sitting on the table edge swinging his legs.

"Y'betcha," replied the deputy.

The couples crowded to the bar. The partner of the red-haired girl had his drink and departed. The red-haired girl strolled across the room, beseeching all and sundry to dance. She was out of luck till she passed Sam Bellows who promptly stretched out a long arm and seized her by the wrist.

"Lemme alone!" she squalled, and jerked free with a twist and a wrench.

Bellows, smiling wickedly, slid from the window sill and grabbed her again. She clawed at his eyes with her free hand and spat like a cat.

"Lemme alone, —— yore soul!" she yelled.

Bellows, still smiling, threw up his right hand to guard his eyes. With an incredibly swift movement the girl's head shot forward and her white teeth closed on his fingers. She began to chew savagely.

Bellows instantly released her arm and ground his hard knuckles into her cheek.

"Leggo!" he panted. "Leggo!"

Her reply to that was to scratch his face from temple to chin. His fingers closed on her throat. He had ceased to smile. His teeth were bare to the gum. His expression was murderous.

Then, Kansas Casey in the lead, seven men flung themselves upon Bellows, and two others grappled with the woman.

"Stop it!" bawled Windy Taylor, as with thumb and second finger he strove to force apart her jaws after the fashion of one persuading a stubborn horse to take the bit.

The lady clung to Bellows and closed down like a bulldog. A trickle of blood dribbled from the corners of her mouth. She was not pretty to look upon.

The little group of struggling people swayed and stamped and reeled to and fro and banged against the wall. Windy did not cease to pry and beseech the lady to "Leggo!" But he could not break her grip. Bellows, with various men attached to his arms and legs, was helpless. But he could curse. And he did—horribly.

The fiddler, who had disappeared, now returned bearing a pepper-pot. This article of kitchen-ware he upended and violently shook in front of the red-haired girl's nose. She sneezed. Her jaws opened, and the men holding her bore her backward with a rush. The men fastened upon Bellows bore him as rapidly in the other direction.

"Pepper always fixes 'em," observed the fiddler, and returned to his table and climbed upon it to his chair.

The red-haired girl, reaction setting in, sat down on the floor and sobbed stormily. She also sneezed at not infrequent intervals, for the fiddler's pepper had been finely ground.

Sam Bellows, released somewhat hastily by Casey's assistants, stood in the doorway. Blood oozed sluggishly down his well-scratched face and dripped from his torn fingers. He had regained control of himself, but his light eyes, the pupils narrowed to pin-points, were deadly. Kansas Casey faced him hardily. The deputy had not drawn his gun, but his right hand swung close to the butt. He placed no trust in Sam Bellows, despite the latter's partial disablement.

"This will be about all," said Kansas Casey quietly. "Drag it out o' here."

"S'pose I don't feel like goin'," Bellows suggested with icy calm.

"I ain't makin' no threats—but you'll go just the same."

"You've got the call," Bellows said with a feline grin. "I'll go—now. But I'll be back. I seem to have made a lot o' friends here tonight."

His light eyes picked out the faces of the men who had been holding him.

"The bridle's off to you tomorrow, but you won't come in here again tonight," declared the deputy. "An' I'd go a li'l slow, if I was you—later."

"You ain't me," said Bellows shortly, and he wheeled and walked out into the night.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BRANDING

NEXT day's stage brought a letter for Miss Blythe. She showed it happily to Henderson in front of the Blue Pigeon. It was from the cashier of the First National in Piegan City, and duly set forth that three thousand dollars had been deposited to Miss Blythe's account.

"That's fine," said Henderson. "It come sooner'n I expected. Didja ask Mike about goin' partners?"

"I did. He said, 'Shore.' We're going to get a whole lot of new stock and make the store bigger."

"That's the stuff. Put a crimp in Dolan an' Calloway."

On the instant the girl's expression altered subtly. A shiver of repugnance made her eyelids flicker. But it was not Henderson's words that affected her. Sam Bellows was coming down the street. Henderson saw him, too, and began to speak of a certain gray pony that he was positive Miss Blythe would enjoy riding. Out of his eye-corners he continued to watch Bellows. He noted that the puncher's right hand was bandaged and that he wore his six-shooter in a new left-handed holster tied down on his left leg.

Bellows smiled openly at Miss Blythe as he passed. Because the scratches on his face were deep and long it was an oddly crooked smile. Over his shoulder he gave Henderson the feline grin he had bestowed on Kansas Casey the evening before. Miss Blythe shivered again.

"I—I guess I'll go in," she said a trifle wanly.

Henderson followed her into the Blue Pigeon.

"Look here," he ground out roughly. "He's scarin' you again. You just lemme off that promise, will yuh?"

She shook her head.

"No, I won't. He just makes me feel shaky when he looks at me that way. I'm not scared, truly I'm not—when you're around."

She looked up at him with her great dark eyes—eyes that were deep pools of mystery. Her lips were parted ever so little. Henderson caught his breath. He had never seen her look like this. Nor had he ever felt like this. At other times, when in her company, he had experienced a certain pleasant mental agitation. But that sensation was but a ripple to the wave of feeling that engulfed him now. He stared. Her eyes held his unwaveringly. He trembled like an over-ridden horse. There was in his ears a buzzing as of countless bees. He tried to speak and couldn't. He gulped like a schoolboy and passed a shaking hand across his forehead.

"Tha-tha's fine," he finally managed to stammer out, and incontinently fled to his haven of refuge, the log at the hotel corral.

"Whatsa matter with me?" he asked himself furiously. "I got lots o' things to say to her, an' I can't say 'em. Last night I could talk to her like a house afire. This is a helluva note!"

Mrs. Lainey, busy in the hotel kitchen, wondered why he was making cigarets and throwing them away unsmoked. She decided, wise woman though she was, that Henderson was drunk.

In the afternoon came the Rainbow on Windigo and said that all things were ready. Henderson listened to her words and smiled. The smile was not mirthful. It was sardonic. The Rainbow narrowed her black eyes and smiled back. Nor was her smile pleasant. One perceived the lurking Indian.

"Everythin's fixed this end," observed Henderson. "Sing Luey's kitchen door at nine o'clock will be about right."

"It should," said the Rainbow.

"Instead of a glass, I guess we'll make it a bottle."

"That will be better. So long, old-timer, see you later."

The Rainbow whirled Windigo and was gone.

AT HALF-PAST nine o'clock in the evening Henderson and Chuck Morgan walked into the dance-hall. Chuck Morgan took position at the bar near the door. But Henderson did not. He sat down across the room on a chair facing the bar. Henderson had a bottle with him. At times he appeared to take long and healthy pulls at that bottle. It was not manifest to the naked eye that Henderson's tongue corked the bottle every time he tilted it.

The crowd in the Dewdrop was not so large as on the previous evening. Kansas Casey and a fair sprinkling of prominent citizens were present together with several riotous Bar S punchers engaged in the pleasing business of spending two months' pay. But of those six gentlemen that had assisted Casey in the subduing of Sam Bellows only one, a quiet-eyed person named Kane, was in attendance.

It may have been that the presence of Sam Bellows himself had something to do with their absence. For Sam was slouching on a chair in a far corner. From underneath his shading hat brim he was watching the dancers. His attitude and expression betokened a lazy tranquility of matter and mind. Now and then he smiled slightly, crookedly. Certainly one could not divine his thoughts.

A dance ended and the couples paraded to the bar. It was the first occasion since the arrival of Henderson and Chuck Morgan that all five of the dance-hall girls had been at the bar at the same time. Henderson glanced at Chuck. The latter sauntered across the room and leaned against the wall near Henderson.

"Aw ——!" exclaimed Henderson drunkenly, and dashed his bottle on the floor.

At the crash the folk drinking at the bar turned their heads. It was consistent then, Henderson having seated himself with that end in mind, that the doorway should be included in the scope of their vision.

The cork of the shattered bottle had not ceased to roll when a man stepped in from the outer dark and halted in the doorway. To all intents and purposes the man was Rufe Thompson in the flesh. From boots to hat his clothing was Rufe Thompson's. He stood there, thumbs hooked in his belt, silently regarding a stricken roomful.

The unfortunate Snakebite was the first to recover the use of his faculties—recovered them only to lose them instantly. After uttering a terriffic squawk of fright he foamed at the mouth and fell down in a fit. The bartender dived under the bar. The fiddler jumped through a window, taking with him in his flight the sash thereof. The efficient Chuck Morgan hopped through another window to head off the fiddler.

But no one paid any attention to these four and their actions. For one of the brunettes, her face gray-blue spotted with red, was out in the middle of the room screaming like a lost soul.

"Go 'way!" she shrieked at the man in the doorway. "Whatcha hauntin' me for? I didn't know he was gonna kill yuh! I swear I didn't! I didn't know what was gonna happen, or I'd never helped! Gawd! Gawd! Don't look at me that way! I can't stand it! They made me do it! They did! They did! Lemme alone! I tell yuh I didn't know Sam Bellows was gonna kill yuh!"

The brunette gasped, choked, then flung up her arms and crumpled to the floor in a dead faint. Henderson, who had been moving unobtrusively in the direction of Bellows during the brunette's outburst, went after his gun and leaped forward.

Sam Bellows likewise leaped—toward the nearest window.

The dance-hall was of course in an uproar. The slow-witted folk collided with and impeded their quick-thinking brothers. Calloway, tripping over a chair, fell against Henderson's gun-hand and knocked the upswinging six-shooter to the floor. As though this were not enough the blundering Calloway, scrambling to regain his balance, drove the point of his shoulder into the pit of Henderson's stomach. Which stomach was well-muscled, but it gave under the blow and the gun in Henderson's waistband promptly slid down inside his trousers and jammed its barrel in his boot.

As yet not a shot had been fired, and Sam Bellows was astride a window sill. He was in a fair way to escape when the red-haired girl, swift to discern a heaven-sent opportunity for revenge, hurled herself across the intervening space and wound her arms about his leg. Bellows, snarling, sought to draw his six-shooter.

Both Henderson's guns were out of reach, but he had one card left to play. His right hand flashed to the back of his neck. There was a twinkle of steel in the lamplight, a vicious whir in the smoky air, and Sam Bellows, a nine-inch bowie pinning his left hand to his thigh, fell back into the room.

By the time Henderson, Kansas Casey and the quiet-eyed citizen, Kane, had bandaged Sam Bellows, Chuck Morgan returned marching ahead of him the fiddler and Mr. Tom Stute. The latter, his broken arm still in a sling, was attired solely in a nightshirt.

"Caught Stute slidin' out to his corral when I was goin' after the fiddler," explained Chuck Morgan.

"I was feeling feverish," averred Mr. Stute, forcing a smile. "I guess I was a little delirious perhaps. What's all the row about?"

"We're gonna find out," Henderson told him. "Just as soon as the lady on the floor comes to we're gonna shore find out."

Mr. Stute found no comfort in the words. He was seen to lick his lips and nervously rub one bare ankle against the other. He looked glumly at Sam Bellows.

The fiddler said nothing. He was agitatedly gnawing his nails and staring about him with scared eyes. In this he was at one with many another in the Dewdrop Dance-Hall.

"Whu-where's that ghost?" the fiddler asked suddenly.

"Where is he?" demanded Kansas Casey, scrambling to his feet. In the hurry of the bustling moment he had forgotten the apparition of Rufe Thompson. So, apparently, had Henderson.

"I dunno," said Henderson blankly. "Ain't he here?"

"I—I seen him disappear right where he was standin' in the doorway," quavered Dolan. "He went out like yuh'd blow out a candle."

"He did, huh?" snickered Henderson. "Yuh got eyes like a eagle, Dolan."

"I seen him," insisted Dolan. "I was lookin' right at him."

"Yore imagination is a bird," grinned Henderson. "I'm tellin' yuh— by Gawd! Where's that barkeep?"

Henderson ran behind the bar. The bartender had vanished. Henderson ran out into the street. From afar off sounded the faint *tuck-a-tuck*, *tuck-a-tuck* of galloping horses. The slurring drum dwindled, died out. Henderson reentered the dance-hall.

"Guess the barkeep's sloped," he said to the multitude. "Anybody gone for Jake Rule?" he asked of Kansas Casey.

"I sent Dockery for him," said Kansas. "Say, Henderson, who was that—that ghost?"

"Yeah, who was he?" others wished to know, gazing fearfully the while at the doorway.

"Plenty o' time for explanation later," replied Henderson. "They's no hurry a-tall. The lady's comin' to," he added, glancing down at the prostrate brunette.

The brunette recovered consciousness gaspingly.

"Oh!" she whispered when she could speak. "The ghost! The ghost!"

"Shore, the ghost," said Henderson helpfully. "Happened in quite handy, didn't he? Can yuh sit up?"

Without waiting for a reply he slipped his hands beneath her armpits, lifted her gently and slid her on a chair.

ENTERED then Jake Rule and the marshal and pushed their way through the crowd.

"What's up?" asked Jake.

"The lady's gonna tell us," Henderson said softly.

But the lady was not going to do anything of the kind. She said so profanely.

"Might as well," warned Henderson. "You told quite a lot when—the ghost came in."

The brunette shuddered, but remained silent.

"All right," Henderson said. "I'll just tell yuh, Jake, what I've found out. About two months ago Rufe Thompson was murdered an' robbed here in Farewell."

"I didn't know he was robbed," cut in Jake Rule.

"He was, all right. He was carryin' three thousand dollars in a belt."

"Then that's why his shirt was pulled up out o' his pants!" exclaimed Kansas Casey.

"I expect," said Henderson. "I come up here to get the rights o' the matter. Yuh see, my name's ain't Henderson. It's Derr, Bill Derr."

"Oh." The sheriff's eyes rounded saucerwise. "I've heard o' you. Yo're the feller trailed down 'Cutnose' Canter an' Rime Tolliver an' them other two jiggers that time them four hundred an' twelve hosses was run off from the 88. Wasn't they a murder mixed up in that too?"

"They was," nodded Bill Derr. "An' it was the murder I was interested in, not the hosses. But that ain't got nothin' to do with this. Like I'm telling yuh, I come up to this town. One night, when the girls was all in here, I went through them cribs out back an' I found Rufe's money-belt under the mattress o' that black-haired woman's bed."

"That's a lie!" shrilled that black-haired woman. "Tom burned it!"

"Thanks," Bill Derr said dryly. "I kind o' hoped yuh wouldn't swallow my li'l lie. Tom, I guess this sort o' cinches the hull on you too."

Mr. Stute, a pale body of a man, shrank into himself. Derr turned to the brunette.

"Listen here. We've got Bellows an' Tom Stute already, an' the barkeep an' the fiddler are both under suspicion. Who else was in this? Speak up. Don't be afraid. Turn State's evidence an' save yore neck."

The brunette, held down in her chair by two men, began to rave.

"Does that State's evidence go for me?" the fiddler asked swiftly.

Derr nodded coldly. The fiddler took a long breath.

"Tom Stute, Longhorn an' Lamp Black planned it. They——"

"Kansas," interrupted Jake Rule, "s'pose you sift over to the Happy Heart an' glom on to Lamp Black. Go on," he added to the fiddler.

"The barkeep an' me heard 'em ribbin' up the dead an'—an'—that's how we come to know about it."

"How much djuh get for keepin' yore mouths shut?" flashed Derr.

"Only a hundred apiece."

"Yo're shore cheap. G'on."

"They didn't wanna do the job themselves, so they picked Sam Bellows. He'd come in after dark, put his hoss in Stute's corral an' gone to sleep in Daisy's room." The fiddler jerked his thumb at the hysterical brunette. "So, yuh see, nobody 'ceptin' us six knowed anythin' about Bellows, an' it looked easy. Daisy she tolled Thompson out back o' the stage corrals an' Bellows knifed him an' pulled his freight instanter with his share o' the money. An'—an' that's all."

"It's enough," was Derr's gently spoken opinion.

"I appoint every man here a deputy 'ceptin' the prisoners!" shouted the sheriff. "Kane, you an' Morgan guard 'em. The rest o' yuh get yore hosses. We're a-goin' after that barkeep."

"I don't hardly think it's necessary," interposed Henderson. "I didn't tell yuh that I heard three-four hosses punchin' the breeze when I went outside after the barkeep. I guess the jigger is bein' attended to. Here comes Kansas."

The deputy was the leader of a large delegation from the Happy Heart, of which delegation the desired Lamp Black was not one.

"Where's Lamp?" queried the sheriff.

"He's back there," replied Kansas Casey. "He went after his gun when I throwed down on him. I guess he must 'a' suspicioned somethin'."

"He's saved us trouble," said the sheriff. "Kansas, take one o' the boys an' go out to the 88 an' watch Simms till he's able to ride. Who's this? Why—by Gawd!"

The question and expletive were called forth by the precipitate entry of the Dewdrop barkeeper and Rufe Thompson's ghost. The ghost was prodding forward the barkeeper with the muzzle of a six-shooter. Following the two men were the Rainbow and Willie's Old-Brother-in-Law.

"G'on, —— yuh!" snarled the ghost. "Whatcha waitin' for?"

He gripped the bartender by the collar and flung him sprawling at the sheriff's feet.

"Dunno whether he's wanted or not," went on the ghost, "but I seen him slide out through a side window while I was standin' in the doorway. So me an' Willie's Old-Brother-in-Law an' his niece here took out after him on suspicion. Whatcha find out, Bill? Is he wanted?"

"Plenty, an' he is," replied Derr. "Kansas Casey downed one a while ago, they's another sick abed out at the 88, an' we got the rest."

He indicated bandaged Bellows and the others with a sweep of his hand. The ghost stared at them with smoldering eyes. The spectators stared at the ghost. The latter was obviously a flesh and blood person, but he was an exact replica in features, body, carriage and voice of the dead Rufe Thompson.

"I shore wish the sheriff wasn't here," said the newcomer simply.

"Say, stranger, who are you?" demanded the sheriff.

"I'm Rufe Thompson's brother Sile," was the answer. "I guess yuh didn't know we was twins, didja?"

* * *

BILL DERR, Chuck Morgan and Thompson were the sole occupants of the many-bedded room in the hotel that night.

"Yuh done well, Bill," observed Sile Thompson, pulling off a boot. "Yuh got'em quicker'n I thought yuh would. When djuh begin to suspect 'em?"

"I had a hunch from the start that Tom Stute an' Simms was in it, but I didn't know for shore an'——"

"So that's why y'only nicked 'em that-away!" cried Chuck, bouncing upright on his cot.

"Shore that's why," Henderson said calmly.

"You're got yore nerve!"

"I was scared to death alla time. Bet I lost me a year's growth. It was mostly luck, anyway. I never expected no such haul as we got tonight for my li'l surprise. I only aimed to scare one o' the women into talkin' some."

"Didn'cha suspect Bellows at first?" asked Thompson.

"Not when I sent the Rainbow an' her uncle after yuh I didn't. I didn't see him till right before then anyhow. But when I got to Marysville—an' that was more luck, 'cause I only went there on business for a friend—I heard Dunlavy, the express agent, tell the barkeep at the Sunrise that they was a saddle, bridle, spurs an' chaps, from Blazier's at Pueblo come for Sam Bellows.

"Yuh know yuh can buy saddles up to sixty-eighty dollars in Marysville, so I knowed this saddle must be somethin' fancy—bridle, spurs an' chaps likewise. I was wonderin' where Sam got all his money. I asked 'round an' I heard he'd dropped more'n four hundred playin' the wheel in Marysville. Ten months' wages right there, an' from all I could learn Bellows ain't the savin' kind. Then it come to me that Bellows was sort o' brutal with women, hosses an' men."

"An' the man that killed Rufe was a shore-'nough brute," put in Sile Thompson in a low voice. "Was that it?"

"It gave me the start of an idea. I asked some more an' I found out Bellows drifted into Marysville two days after the murder. I went to the 88 an' they told me the date when Bellows left there. Which date was the mornin' o' the day Rufe was killed. So I began to have more hopes than ever o' what would happen when you'd step into the doorway o' the Dewdrop."

"I shore knowed it would work out when I got yore letter. I dunno why I never thought o' the thing. It was so —— simple. Say, that Injun an' his niece are shore good people, an' sly—Bill, we didn't see nobody but ourselves from the time we left the Slash F till Sing Luey opened the back door o' the Canton."

"I was figurin' that's how it would be," Bill Derr said sleepily.

In the morning Derr, watching his opportunity, walked into the Canton a few minutes after the departure of the last breakfaster.

"Yuh've heard how it turned out," he said to Sing Luey.

"It — turned out remarkably well," nodded Sing Luey, his Oriental features inscrutable as ever.

"Yuh shore helped me out—" Derr began awkwardly.

Sing Luey held up a deprecating hand.

"I am paid," he said. "You have rid me of two enemies. Stute and Simms once did me an injury. They thought it did not matter; that I did not matter. I waited.

I could afford to wait. I knew my time would come. It did. You saw."

"You suspected them two from the beginnin', huh?"

"I did not suspect. I knew. But I had no proof. You came. You, with my poor help, obtained those proofs. Ah, I am grateful. I will show you."

He whipped from beneath his embroidered silk over-shirt a small figurine of carved jade. Squat, hideously ugly, the image sat upon Sing Luey's yellow palm and leered greenly at Bill Derr.

"This," continued the Celestial, "is—is—I can not tell you what it is in your language. But it is very old. It is a thousand years older than Kong-Fou-Tse, and he died nearly five hundred years before your God was born. It brings good luck to whomsoever receives it as a gift. To whomsoever steals it from the person to whom it has been given it brings evil and much sorrow. It was given to me, a gift. I give it to you, a gift. Take it."

He held it out. Bill Derr, making nothing at all of Sing Luey's words, thanked the Chinaman, and thrust the figurine into the breast pocket of his shirt, where it cuddled his tobacco bag on one side and a pencil stub on the other.

"Shake," said Derr, extending his hand. "Yo're all right, Sing Luey. Any time yuh want a favor done an' I can do it, I'll take it kindly if yuh'll call on me. Yuh know where I live. Just lemme know, that's all."

"I'll remember," smiled Sing Luey, and shook hands with Occidental firmness of grip.

"So long," said Bill Derr, and departed.

In the street he met Sile Thompson.

"Where you been?" asked Sile. "I been chasin' yuh all over. Got a proposition, Bill. I was gonna tell yuh last night, but you was too sleepy. I got a chance to buy the Slash F. Wanna come in with me?"

"I ain't got the money."

"You got some. Don't try to tell me different. Put in whatcha got an' pay the rest o' yore share out of the profits. In five years we'll be all square, even-Steven. Say yes, cowboy, say yes."

"Gimme a chance! Shut up an' I will! I'll beller it plumb in yore ear! The Slash F! That's shore luck."

Luck! He remembered the words of Sing Luey. His hand flew to his breast pocket. Through the thickness of flannel his fingers pinched the jade figurine. Leaving Sile Thompson all standing he hurried off in the direction of the Blue Pigeon.

"Hey, where yuh goin'?" cried Sile Thompson.

The retreating Henderson hunched a shoulder by way of reply and continued on his way. His lips moved silently.

"I'm gonna crowd that luck," he was saying to himself. "I'm shore gonna crowd that luck for all it's worth."

Sile Thompson watched his friend enter the Blue Pigeon Store.

"I'd shore admire to know what's eatin' Bill," he muttered, and scratched a puzzled head. "Guess maybe I'll go see."

At the door of the Blue Pigeon he met Mike Flynn and Chuck Morgan coming out. Mike closed the door softly, sat down firmly on the sill and planted a wide back against the door. Chuck Morgan teetered on his heels and grinned idiotically.

"Say, I was goin' in there," Sile Thompson said wrathfully.

"You was, but you ain't," chuckled Mike.

"What the ——"

"Come away where it's cool, Thompson," urged the grinning Morgan. "Le's go have a drink, a lot o' drinks."

"I don't want no drink. I wanna see Bill. Whatsa matter with you fellers? Y'all crazy, or what?"

"Shore we are. An' Bill's crazy too, all same fox. C'mon."

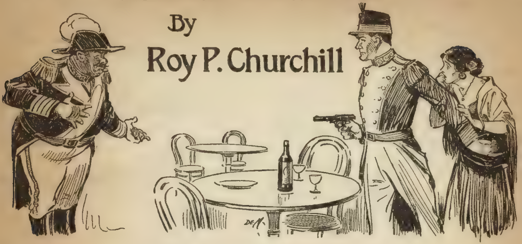
Sile Thompson went. He had to.

Later, when he came to see matters and individuals in their proper light and place, he quite agreed with Chuck Morgan that Bill Derr was as mad as that notably intelligent animal, the gray fox of the waste places.

THE FRAYED STRAND

By

Roy P. Churchill



Author of "Off the Course," "Arab," etc.

ONE thing which the men of the U. S. S. *Rainbow* respected in Boatswain's Mate Dick Reasoner was that he always stood to an issue face to face. He might lay uncannily clever plans to make things come out right, and dodge plain trouble when there was just as good a way free from it, but when a thing was squarely up to him, he did not squirm and side-step to save his face, but had it out, win or lose, right there.

It was Wednesday afternoon, "Rope Yarn Sunday," and the *Rainbow's* crew had their kits and ditty-boxes strewn about the forecastle while they sewed, wrote letters, and gossiped. A homey, peaceful scene, and into it Dick Reasoner fitted perfectly. He sat on a sea-chest with his back to a wire deck-locker full of scrubbers, squilgees, swabs and paint rags, and read a book, smiling sometimes as if it was a funny story, and again scowling intently as if it might be a drill manual.

But the book was neither. It was a dictionary, and its well-thumbed pages had earned for Dick Reasoner the nickname, "Dictionary Dick," and the right from his shipmates to expect that he would help them out of their troubles.

Today Reasoner smiled little. He searched the book for help in a difficult problem, and presently Clay McCune came and sat beside him, bringing the matter to a point. Reasoner slipped the little book into his blouse. Compared to McCune, he was solid, steady-eyed and bulwarklike, and his smile was an invitation to the other man to unload.

Clay McCune was almost as tall as Reasoner, but slighter in build, with slim, sinewy hands and brilliantly fascinating dark eyes which had in them also a keen restlessness, as if his soul walked back and forth behind them as a caged beast behind bars.

McCune took a hurried look about him, and lowered his voice.

"I'm going to jump," he said, with a bare shade of defiance which was not necessary with Reasoner.

"I've seen it coming since we dropped anchor," said Reasoner.

Then he swept his arm out toward the rim of the crescent bay where Port Antonio lay tucked in at the foot of the mountains.

"It is this?" he asked.

McCune nodded, and without speaking the two looked shoreward across the bay. Between the shimmering blue water, with its strip of white beach, and the towering bulk of Santa Inez Mountain with its lights and shadows of tropic green, the town was a bright splash of color, with its red roofs and its gay flags, brilliant in the sunlight. Truly it was a port of romance, and to this place chance had brought Clay McCune and his trouble-begetting rashness, when the boy needed cool, sober remolding, something to curb the wanderlust, too high-pitched in this soul.

"I thought I'd tell you," McCune broke the silence apologetically. "It's due you. You've tried hard, but this place was made for me. The call is so strong it breaks down everything else. A canoe from shore is coming out to get me."

Dick Reasoner did not argue. McCune had made his choice against his sworn word, against allegiance to his country, against the confidence of his friends who had plead that he be given one more chance. So Reasoner said nothing. True, he could have him put in the brig, and held him by force, but this was not Reasoner's way. If he had failed with McCune, having the man in the brig would not turn the defeat into victory.

"I don't want you to feel bad," McCune continued. "You've done all you could. Old Hippole Ferez is going to hide me until the ship sails, and then make me captain of his machine-gun company. I'm telling you all about it, because I know you won't snitch."

McCune's eyes sparkled, and he looked steadily at Reasoner. For the moment his restlessness had given way to purpose. Reasoner smiled enigmatically.

"I hope it turns out all right, Clay, but old Ferez will do to watch."

"What do you mean? He can't afford to double-cross me."

"You can't tell. Just look out, boy. There's a word in the book that mighty few spiggoties know anything about. Far as that goes, a lot of us miss its real meaning. It's 'loyalty.' Notice how it sounds, warm and comforting and smooth, but it has force in it, too. Just as if it was a strapping six-footer leading along little sister by the hand."

"I'm sick of lectures, Dick. I know what you're driving at, and who you're aiming at. What if the outfit did take me back and give me another chance after I'd had a dozen? What if the judge did say that the Navy was no place for bad characters and put it up to the commandant whether to send me back or to send me up for two years?

"I know all about how the commandant put it up to the captain, and the captain put it up to you, and what a bunch of young fellows you've shoved over on the right side when they started to lean. But it won't do with me. I'm sorry, Dick. I like you, and I like the outfit, and I honestly thought I might make it if I had another trial. But what's the use? I'm not built for steady going."

"I didn't mean to lecture," said Reasoner, "and I want no praise. All I've done is to put the things before you. Maybe you'll hit the right course some day. This may be the one. I hope so, Clay, but I don't trust Port Antonio. She's a witch and a siren. She had a rainbow over her like a crown this morning, and I can feel myself swing out toward her to the end of the anchor chain. That's what you need, Clay, an anchor, something to swing to. That's what you lack. Get you one, Clay."

The young man stretched out his arms toward the city.

"It's over there, Dick. I feel it!"

Reasoner shook his head in warning.

"Not old Ferez and his machine-gun captaincy. Not that slim, wild, half-white dancer at the Independencia, nor the indolent luxury of the long soft days. They'll pass just as the other bright things that you have tried to tie to have passed. It's something inside. I've tried hard to find it for you, and have failed. But before you go, I'm offering you the word from the little book—the one I told you about, 'loyalty.' If you could shackle to that somehow you'd be safe anywhere."

Dick Reasoner was nearer to winning Clay McCune at that moment than at any other time. Impulsively McCune turned.

"I'll stay, then, Dick!" he cried.

Reasoner was not elated.

"Think it over," he advised.

He knew too well McCune's habit of good resolves quickly broken. Then the two sat silently again, looking out to sea, and around the trim white deck with its contented groups at their homely tasks among the black gun-muzzles, and after a time McCune's eyes turned again toward the city, and he decided as Reasoner knew he would.

"I'm going, Dick. All this stuff has lost out with me. I'd be booze-fighting, liberty-breaking, trouble-making, again in no time. I'm not really deserting. I'm trying to keep out of trouble. Maybe that anchor you have been talking about is over there."

"Look for it, Clay," said Reasoner, and the two parted.

The next morning Clay McCune did not answer to muster, and ten days later he was posted as a deserter.

BETWEEN being a guest at Port Antonio and being a resident, Clay McCune soon found there was a wide difference. The *Rainbow* had gone, and no longer did he hide himself at Señor Ferez's inland plantation, while the marines came ashore and went through the usual haunts of sailors to find him. He was dressed now in the uniform of a captain, and on fête days was bedecked in much gold lace, and a sword, which tripped him.

But no longer was he a guest. Port Antonio threw back the veil, so that he could see beneath the rice powder and the gaiety and the feasting, and he found her more than a witch and a siren. She was also a cat with sharp claws in her velvet pads. He found himself only the present favorite of Vesta, the dancing girl at the Independencia, the last of a dozen captains of the machine-gun company, one of the city's small group of aliens, a paid mercenary.

Yet in Clay McCune there was a quality which those before him had not had. True his skin was white, but his heart was restless, impulsive, unstable, which gave him a soul kinship with those among whom he lived.

For all that, McCune felt himself apart, in fact, drew himself apart, after the manner of all men whose skin is white, and in the councils where Hippole Ferez dictated and intrigued and schemed to hold his place, McCune had no part, but did his work as he was told.

"Almost, Señor El Capitan, you are one of us," Ferez had praised him, when the company had come back from the prompt quelling of an incipient revolution, and now something bigger was on.

McCune felt it, but could not place it. Deference itself was the dictator, and Suave and Polite his satellites, but it was through the girl at the Independencia that he found out, and that almost by accident.

They were sitting in the little restaurant next to the theater, whose patio overlooked the bay.

"Here's to he whom the Bull trusts," she said, holding up the yellow wine to the moon before she brought it to her lips.

"Bull?" questioned McCune, the words rousing him from the dreamy seductiveness of Port Antonio at night, which had not yet lost its charm.

"Señor Ferez. He is the Bull. With the people, it is his name."

"So you think he trusts me?"

"Si, señor, why not? Do you not go soon on a mission of importance? Those who kill for Señor Ferez he trusts."

McCune feigned indifference.

"Where do you get this idle gossip?" he bantered. "You know nothing."

Piqued, the dancing girl drained her glass, and turned on him half-angrily. She would show this Americano just how deep she was in her country's schemes.

"Listen," she said, lowering her voice. "Does not Estreda yet live unconquered at La Combra? Is he not rich? Has not the ship of war Americano gone to a safe distance?"

McCune was startled, and misunderstanding his emotion, the girl continued——

"Did the Americano think that Señor Ferez, the Bull, brought him to dress and to play?"

The words stung McCune, but he kept his temper, and answered evenly.

"All right, Vesta, my girl, I'm sick of inaction, anyhow."

There was a note of exultation in his voice which surprised the dancer. It was this quality of unexpectedness in him which kept her wondering. Almost he was one of them, as Ferez had said.

"I hope, then," she changed instantly, "that Ferez makes you a general and that you come back to me safely. You are to head the expedition, my Americano."

McCune did not doubt the girl's story, for he knew a little of the complete dominion over the island which Ferez coveted, and of the defiance of a smaller neighbor, who had already beaten off an ill-timed invasion. Now McCune knew why ammunition for target practise had been plentiful, drills multiplied, and the picked men placed in the machine-gun company with two modern guns.

In the few days that followed Ferez's verification of the dancing girl's story, McCune became better acquainted with his chief. They were together a great deal, Ferez directing, driving, scheming, and McCune began to know why his people called him affectionately and half-fearfully, the Bull. A week later they brought their little army safely over the mountain trails, each man well-fed, well-armed and confident, to a smaller crescent bay, and the town of La Combra.

The attack was less of a surprise than

Ferez had hoped. At the edge of the town they met scouting parties and sentries, defeated them with small loss, and then fighting from house to house drove Estreda and a remnant of his followers to the Government house in the plaza. Here the defenders made their prepared stand, and three desperate charges had failed to dislodge them. Nightfall found the scattered inhabitants gaining confidence, coming back to their houses, and some bolder spirits creeping in to join Estreda with another gun, or another small store of food and ammunition.

"The last time, for three days we did not come so far," Ferez told his leaders confidently. "Tomorrow we will take the place by storm."

Clay McCune was happy. The day had been full of thrills with its quick changes of fortune, and Ferez had praised the work of the deadly machine-guns more than once. The two made a tour of the camp, inspecting the sentries strung around the hostile buildings in the center of the plaza.

"Today is proof we made no mistake in our captain the Americano," said Ferez. "When we get back, the captain will find he had made no mistake in us. He shall have more than the prize he has already taken."

At daylight the wily Estreda sent a messenger with a flag of truce. Warfare still held to its historic code in Antonio. Estreda warned that he would resist to the last, that his store of food and ammunition was ample, and that reinforcements were on the way.

"Only the beaten talk thus," replied Ferez, and sent his men to the attack with new vigor. From house to house and wall to wall they closed in on Estreda's stronghold, making short rushes from cover to cover.

Estreda's thick brick building was in the center of a walled-in court, pierced with loopholes. It was against this outer wall that Ferez had thrown his men in the preceding attacks, and against which he had failed in the first invasion. Now Clay McCune swept the loopholes on the wall clear with the machine-guns, so that Ferez's men climbed up and chased the defenders in a rout to the house itself.

Through the wall a wide gate led down an avenue of palms to the house. Half-way in was a fountain, around which the walk and the palm border curved gracefully. This walk and fountain were the work of Estreda's predecessor, and also the means of his downfall, for Estreda had pointed out the luxury to the "great common people," slipped into power on account of it, and became in turn the possessor of its splendor.

But an election impended, and patriotically he had dried up the fountain, and let grass grow between the bricks of the pavement, so that what once had been his secret pride was now his advertisement of economy, and by the queer fortunes of war might become his undoing.

Still protected by the machine-guns, Ferez's soldiers broke open the huge iron gate and crept to the fountain. Inside it on the dried mud with its wisps of dead ferns and water lilies, they were safe from rifle-fire from the house, and a group of picked men gathered for another dash forward, while they answered the shots from the windows of the house.

Ferez and McCune stood safely in an angle of the wall by the gate.

"We could wheel them inside," said McCune of the guns. "A little to one side so that the palms would not interfere, then keep the windows clear while the rush was made. With a beam to break in the door, the place will be ours in ten minutes. That fountain gives us a ready-made bullet-proof dug-out."

Ferez beamed. His captain was truly a rich find. Step by step he had cleared the way with the guns, and they had not jammed once. There seemed an uncanny brotherhood between their death-dealing black muzzles with their complicated, sensitive interiors, and this Americano. In consequence of it, his loss had been only enough to make his men bold, eager, and to add to their spirits.

"It is well, señor," said Ferez. "I will give the order to get the beam ready, and fill Estreda's fountain to the brim with my best fighting men, and you, my Captain, be careful, for after all, there must be a leader, and one such is worth a fountain full of the bravest."

A MESSENGER stopped the preparation, for so urgent was his news that Ferez and McCune ran across the bullet-swept plaza to the roof of a house on its border, where protected by a façade from the shots behind them, they could see the harbor.

"It's the *Rainbow!*" exclaimed McCune, hardly believing that it could be true, yet while they looked the American warship came to a stop, the anchor chain went out with a rumble, as boat booms were rigged out, and gangways dropped in place, in true man-o'-war style. The *Rainbow's* captain had been on this station too long not to know the value of the unexpected. He had implied that the *Rainbow* was going to her base, and then run back to see how his charges were behaving.

"What is the custom?" demanded Ferez, furious at the interruption, with victory in sight. "What will be done?"

An hour later he could have had the captain ashore for dinner, and all would have been well. But what now?

"Quick, Señor McCune!" he urged.

McCune shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's all off. I have seen them do this too often. They'll come ashore. Estreda will tell them all about it, and we will either have to go home in peace, or be chased away by the *Rainbow's* guns."

"But we have the victory," argued Ferez. "You say so yourself. Estreda is beaten. Why is it they should take sides with him against me, instead of me against him? I'm the stronger, is it not so?"

"Hard luck," said McCune, "but the trouble is that we recognize the 'Ins' against the 'Outs' every time."

"We?" questioned Ferez.

A little sadly McCune pointed to the gray ship.

"I beg pardon, señor, 'they.' There will be an officer with a police guard at first, and following that a landing party and heavy guns, if both sides are not good. I'd call the men and get safely out of the way, with the machine-guns, of course. We have lost mighty few as it is, and when the *Rainbow* does get away—she won't stay long if all is quiet—we'll slip down here again and do the trick."

For McCune the joy had gone out of the adventure. He only wanted to get away now safe from recognition. Ferez turned to him with a well-feigned air of resignation.

"It is Fate, señor," he shrugged. "I will attend to everything. You had best get away first. Take two men as a guard. On the road outside the city I will join you. As you say, perhaps another time we will be more successful."

As McCune slipped from the roof the boat from the *Rainbow* came alongside the boat-landing and discharged an officer and ten sailors. McCune's one idea as he dodged along from building to building out of sight of Estreda's marksmen, was not to be seen by his comrades. He had not even bothered to take the guards that Ferez had suggested. Then he slowed down, stopped, and before he had gone half a dozen blocks, he was creeping back stealthily, without knowing the exact reason, unless as always he was acting on impulse, and there had been a glint in the back of Señor Ferez's eye as he so easily gave up a victory almost won.

Or it might have been that he came back to see his comrades again, all in white, with their jaunty hand-sewed hats, loose blouses and flaring trousers. White, too, of skin, and clean all through. How long had it been since he had seen ten men, all white, together? Whatever his motive, it found him at last on a roof, overlooking the plaza, and this is what he saw.

First, Señor Ferez had not withdrawn his men, and the plaza was strangely, ominously silent. Only an occasional shot from a roof, from a doorway, from the fountain in the courtyard, kept Estreda's men in their places, and they had almost ceased to answer since help was at hand, for Estreda knew the rule that the "Ins" should be protected, and wondered a little at Ferez's stupidity in not getting his men away while he could.

McCune was puzzled at first, but from his vantage-point he could see every detail. Ferez had withdrawn his men from the shoreward side of the plaza and wall. The two machine-guns were hidden in a flaring angle beside the gate. This left the street up which the sailors marched clear. It had the appearance of being deserted and harmless.

Close against the courtyard wall came the landing-party from the *Rainbow*. Ensign Jennings was two paces ahead of the little column of twos headed by Dick Reasoner. Even at that distance McCune recognized Reasoner's breadth of shoulder, and his half-slouching, yet springy step, and his whole appearance of latent power and strength held in reserve. His heart moved out toward this man. He was glad to see him again. Dictionary Dick at least had been patient and kind and long-suffering.

So taken was McCune with this that the column was a third of the way down the wall toward the gate, before the full meaning of Ferez's trickery came to him, for inside the courtyard in the abandoned fountain Ferez had made a new disposition of his forces. Of the twenty men who were sheltered there, only two had their rifles pointed at Estreda's house. The others faced the wide gate, rifles laid along the edge of the cracked cement. Also across the courtyard outside the wall, ladders had been placed, and more rifles pointed from the wrong side of the loopholes toward the gate entrance.

Ferez had not meant to give up, after all. Since the American ship had come unexpectedly, it should help instead of hindering his plans. At least in this way there was a bare chance, better than ignominiously accepting defeat. The plan was very simple. When the sailors came from behind the shelter of the wall and into the gateway, he would open fire on them from the fountain, and from the wall almost behind Estreda's house. There were eleven, and some, one or two, perhaps, would escape to the ship with the story that the house in the plaza had fired on them.

In the meantime, Ferez would withdraw his men, to the flanking houses outside the wall, still keeping Estreda's men at bay inside the courtyard. Then on them would fall the wrath of the ship's guns, and Estreda's power would be wiped out forever. Yes, it was a good plan. Ferez chuckled over it, and on the opposite wall with his sharpshooters waited to give the signal to the picked men in the fountain.

Clay McCune had no struggle with himself as to what he should do, no false idea of loyalty to his master, Bull Ferez. He saw only that his shipmates, white men like himself, his friend Dick Reasoner, were about to go up against a deadly piece of native trickery. He ran to the rear of the low house, and slid feet first to the ground, dodged around the buildings into the street, and plunged madly forward across the plaza toward the advancing sailors. He ran with both hands up, shouting, "Stop!" and spoiled utterly Ferez's chance of surprise.

"Kill him," ordered the dictator, and gave the signal to fire.

Bullets thudded into the dust, glanced from the scattered paving blocks, and slipped by overhead almost silently with their cold breath of death, but at this unexpected appearance of the gringo gone amuck, Ferez's men fired uncertainly, and McCune made the shelter of the wall unhurt, and jumped across the deadly gate entrance, in time to be recognized, and his warning understood.

But Bull Ferez was not one to give up easily. His hand had been forced, but he meant to play it out. There was still left a good opportunity to make an attack on the sailors, and have it credited to Estreda, if only McCune were killed, and on this chance he signaled his picked men in the bowl of the fountain to charge. Ignoring the fact that Estreda might open fire at their backs, they obeyed their chief promptly, ran down the palm-bordered walk, and burst from the gate, firing as they came.

Instead of a surprised, uncertain group in close order, which Ferez had counted on routing in a swift attack, the native soldiers met prepared resistance, for McCune had seen them coming as he crossed the gate, and flat on their faces, deployed to the best advantage, the sailors poured in a searching volley at close range, which sent the soldiers hurrying back to the gate's ornamental approaches, and what shelter they could find for sniping.

Ferez stormed impotently, first at the failure of his plan, and then at his own men as group after group lying quiescent in the surrounding buildings according to orders, joined the fight against the sailors. To fight gringoes, especially when they were outnumbered, was a chance in a lifetime, and they were rapidly getting out of hand.

"There are too many for us," said Ensign Jennings. "We'll get out of this. Fall back, and take advantage of all cover until we can find a better place to hold them."

Dodging swiftly across the plaza, stopping to fire from tree trunks, and doorways, the sailors made their way to the mouth of the street which led to the beach, carrying their wounded with them.

"We'll signal for help from here," decided Ensign Jennings. "Johnson is bad hit, and it hurts him to be carried without a stretcher."

But already the landing-party in force was under way. The *Rainbow's* captain had heard the outburst of firing, and knew the country too well to take a chance. The sight of the crowded boats speeding to the rescue, and the toll which the sailors' rifles had taken, brought Ferez's men to their senses. Hastily he collected them, cursing his officers, threatening to shoot any man who disobeyed, and by the time the landing-party had climbed the hilly street to the small detail entrenched and ready, even the sniping had ceased, and Ferez's whole expedition, with even his wounded and dead, was on its way back over the mountain to its own city.

Estreda sent down his white flag, was voluble in his explanations, and begged for protection from "the bandit of the north." So evident was the truth of his story, coupled with McCune's evidence, that the captain granted his plea for recognition as a permanent "In," which had been denied before, and after a week's inspection and the cleaning up of several reform measures, the *Rainbow* sailed away, leaving the estimable Señor Estreda happy and established, safe from marauding neighbors, and assured of reelection, if the machinery which so far had never failed, continued to work.

THE manner of McCune's coming back aboard the *Rainbow* elevated him far above an ordinary deserter, and a scuttle-butt rumor got about that his punishment was to be light. So far he had taken his place in his old division, and swung his hammock in his old billet. In due course of time, preferably when officers from another ship could take part, there would be a court-martial. There was method in this, for the captain wanted to see how McCune would knuckle down to work after his experience ashore.

"McCune's making good," announced "Slim" Higgins. "He's settling down like a fellow whose chief sport was collecting hash marks."

Dick Reasoner agreed heartily, too heartily, and Slim caught the false note.

"You're not sure!"

"Nothing's sure," said Reasoner, "but why poke into things with the sharp end of a stick? He's doing all right now, let's help him."

Reasoner wouldn't admit, even to his friend Slim Higgins, that there was the shadow of a doubt in his mind, lest in some way it might throw a straw in the path of Clay McCune, but Reasoner couldn't help remembering that McCune had come back from each of his exploits with the same chastened spirit, the same earnest taking up of the ship's routine, the same pledges to stick, in his words and in his work; and each time there had crept in finally the old unrest, the old rebellion, which led him in the end thrill-questing to disaster.

To Reasoner, Clay McCune had not made a deciding choice when he slid from the roof and ran across the plaza under fire to save the landing-party from slaughter. His choice had been one that few men could refuse, since Ferez had tricked him, and men of his own blood were in danger of death. Reasoner took it as a good and hopeful omen in the man's character, but not as conclusive evidence.

The week in the harbor at La Combra was followed by a week at sea. The *Rainbow's* captain had a habit of running away now and then to deep, open water to clear his brain, and that of his crew, of the island's witchery of indolent carelessness, its ceaseless fermenting of selfish interests. These days at sea were filled to the brim with drills, with target-practise, with exacting routine, but men and officers came back to their duties with new snap and decision to apply to their work, with a wider perspective, besides keeping the natives guessing which port would receive the next call.

In that week Clay McCune's presence aboard the *Rainbow* became a matter of course. He was fitted again to the machine, lost the savor of romance with which his shipmates had clothed his desertion, and in consequence suffered a return of his old restlessness.

Then, as before, the *Rainbow* dropped anchor in Port Antonio. For two days the captain had impressed on Ferez the fact that Estrada's territory was tabu. It was night of the second day—soft, warm, enchanting—and Reasoner and McCune sat on the sea-chest with the old problem still unsolved.

"They won't let me go ashore," complained McCune.

"First-class men for daylight liberty only," said Reasoner. "Not even second-class. What'd you expect with a court martial hanging over you?"

McCune took the rebuke silently, but after a moment spoke again.

"This grind is getting me, Dick. A week of it seems like a year, and I thought that maybe if they'd let me go ashore——"

"They won't," interrupted Reasoner.

"I know it, Dick. But what's to keep me from slipping ashore some night, this night, if I like, and seeing the old haunts again? The girl sent for me, you know. It would help me to win out. I can get a boat easily; give myself several hours ashore, and be back a little after midnight."

"Don't do it!" cautioned Reasoner, knowing as he spoke that McCune would go that very night.

"I'll have to taper off," argued McCune. "I can't stop quick like this. This day-by-day sameness is torture. I can take up the fight better if I break away."

"No," said Reasoner firmly. "You don't pour oil on fire to put it out, nor starve anything to death by feeding it. The trouble is, Clay, you haven't changed inside. You don't love the solid old Service. Don't talk to me about another fling helping you to win out and fight better, for you're not wanting to settle down. You don't want to give up."

"I guess you're right," said McCune, smiling soberly, "but you're a good old scout, Dick, and I like you best when you argue. I was cut off another pattern and can't be changed. Just as you say, I'm going on this way to the end, because I like it best. I might as well be frank with you, and not try to hedge, but sometimes, a few times—tonight is one—you make me wish that I was a little more like you."

Dick Reasoner left him pacing back and forth across the forecastle, and a little later from the bow came a soft call, and an answer from the still water alongside. McCune slipped down the anchor chain to a waiting boat.

Reasoner might have argued with him at length, preached about duty and loyalty, called a marine sentry and had him locked up, but Reasoner knew it would do no good, for none of these things would change Clay McCune, and with a feeling of helplessness and failure, Reasoner began also to pace the deck.

Vesta, the dancing girl at the Independencia, stopped her sensuous whirl, the musicians missed a beat, and the audience turned in their chairs to look, as Clay McCune walked down the theater's center aisle, and took a seat well forward. He had changed clothes as he came ashore in the native boat, and was dressed in the uniform of a captain of the machine-gun company, with its resplendent, many-colored trimmings.

As McCune took his seat amid the excited whisperings of an audience impressed with his bravado, two men of Ferez's body-guard, seated near the door behind him, slipped unobtrusively out, their very stealthiness making it plain that they sought their master. But unmolested McCune sat through the program, and sent a note to the dancing girl, then stood in the center of an admiring group as the audience filed out, staring, for this was the man—the wild Americano—who had defied Bull Ferez, and cost the dictator a rich province.

Bright-eyed with excitement, Vesta joined him, and the two went to the restaurant adjoining, and into the patio which overlooked the sea.

"You were foolish to come so openly," said the girl, tremulous with admiration, and McCune caught her hand reassuringly.

"What is there to fear, little one? You will notice that the sword which used to trip me is gone, and I have in its place this. A gift from Señor Ferez." He took out and placed on the table a heavy automatic pistol. "We will have our wine. Ferez must get word, must send picked men to make the arrest, and by that time we will be gone."

"Let us hurry, then," pleaded Vesta.

"No," said McCune, athrill with the danger.

The pistol in easy reach gave him confidence. He would play out this little fillip as dramatically as he had begun it.

They had the patio to themselves, and sat facing the door into the restaurant. Well-shaded electric globes lighted the place. A nervous waiter came in to serve them, and spilled the wine as he poured it. Vesta questioned him. His answers were vague, and his eyes furtive. He seemed on the point of flight at each sound from the restaurant.

"I am afraid," whispered the girl, when the waiter left them. "One may be brave, yes, but the Bull has many to kill for him."

"We'll sit here," said McCune stubbornly, "and finish our drink. I don't propose to be stampeded."

"No," said Vesta, "but my Americano is in danger. I feel it! Let us go now before it is too late."

McCune refused, and finished his wine. The restaurant became suddenly strangely silent. The girl clutched his arm.

"They are coming!" she breathed, and McCune pushed her behind him as he rose and faced the door, pistol ready.

Clay McCune knew well the man who stood in the entrance. He was small of stature, but thick and muscular. His wide, evil face, with its sparse-haired drooping mustache and spreading pockmarked nose, was lighted by shrewd, cruel eyes, which missed no detail of the situation. He bowed low as he came through the door, and his hands came forward innocently. McCune's heavy automatic covered him steadily, and it was to this that he gave obeisance, rather than to the man or the girl, for this was Hippole Ferez's prize killer and assassin, Gutierrez the Butcher.

McCune motioned with his free hand to the table before him.

"Your gun!" he ordered crisply, and Gutierrez laid it down obediently.

He knew that the sailor could shoot, and besides, he had other plans.

"May I sit down, señor?" he asked, as McCune took up the extra revolver.

"What do I care?" answered McCune contemptuously. "You might tell my friend Ferez to come himself next time."

Gutierrez sat down at a table in the corner. McCune and the girl started toward the door. The sailor kept one of the revolvers pointed at the killer, and divided his attention between him and the entrance. The corner where Gutierrez sat was dark. He pressed with his foot a small knob on the floor. A bell whirred in the restaurant. McCune stopped. He knew what the bell meant. The Butcher's helpers were waiting. From behind tables, from the bar, from the gallery upstairs, they would snipe at him, and get him, as he went out. Vesta gave a little stifled cry of fear. She too, knew what the bell meant.

"Come here," ordered McCune, menacing Gutierrez with both revolvers. "You go out with me. With one of these poked in your ribs, at the first shot you get yours. Sabe?"

"And you, Vesta," continued McCune, "you stay here safely. I'll come again."

He bent forward to kiss her, and this was the chance that the butcher had waited for —a slimmer chance for himself than he wanted, but since the failure of the other, the only one left, and as he got to his feet with well-feigned clumsiness, he suddenly lifted the lightest table and flung it at McCune, dodging to the floor with the same movement.

The dancing girl was quicker than McCune, and leaped forward to shield him. The table edge struck her forehead. She sank to the floor with the table on top of her, as McCune began firing, first at Gutierrez, laying him low with the second shot, and then at the others charging through the doorway to the attack.

Behind another table in a corner, McCune fought them off, cornered, desperate, short of ammunition, but his soul filled with the wild ecstatic glory of battle. He had been wounded twice.

"This'll be the finish," he muttered. "Old Dictionary Dick was right."

Then, filling the doorway, unarmed, but battle-lights playing in his eyes, came Dick Reasoner.

"I came to arrest this man," he shouted in Spanish, and so far the bluff and his positiveness had carried him safely through. Quickly he strode to the corner, helped McCune to his feet, and with his arm about him, started out.

Gutierrez the Butcher, had regained consciousness. McCune's bullet had only creased his thick scalp. His little eyes glinted as he took in the situation. Then inch by inch along the floor he moved to an abandoned revolver. As he gripped it finally, McCune and Reasoner were almost to the door, McCune leaning against the big sailor's shoulder, limp and tottering from loss of blood. Gutierrez aimed carefully.

He had been sent to kill McCune, and as he pressed the trigger, and saw the limp form momentarily stiffen, and then relax, he knew he had not missed. With a grunt of satisfaction he turned the revolver on Reasoner, who had wheeled at the shot, let McCune's inert body slip to the floor, and crouched for a spring. But Vesta, the dancing girl, was first.

She had seen Gutierrez shoot McCune, had tried desperately to clear herself of the wreckage of the table in time to save him. Now as quick as the swoop of a hawk, she was upon Gutierrez, and drove her keen, jewel-handled stiletto into his heart. Then with a cry of anguish, she hurled the knife over the patio wall toward the sea, and followed Reasoner and his burden.

CLAY McCUNE died before morning in the sick bay on the *Rainbow* with Vesta, the dancing girl, sitting beside him, her slim hand smoothing his forehead. The captain had given her haven and promised her safe passage to her home in another republic.

"I am content, señor," she told Dick Reasoner. "I could never have held him. He was good, so good, but wild. And I was true to him, señor. I have flirted. I have danced, I have been gay, but to him only was I wife."

"Wife!"

"Si, señor. During the first week I took my Americano to the priest. He laugh. 'Sure,' he say, 'anything goes.' And it was so."

And then, with that naïveté so startling in the Latin, she told Reasoner something else, which caused Reasoner to swallow a couple of times, turn red, and then ask:

"What're you going to do? You can't keep on at this dancing. Have you any money?"

She smiled at him.

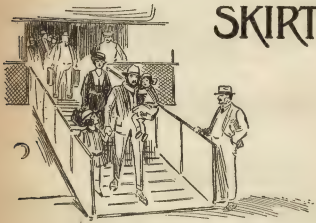
"The good captain takes me to my people. It is enough. They are rich, and I tell my father all."

Reasoner breathed a sigh of relief. What to do with Vesta had worried him, and for once the dictionary had seemed to fail him. As soon as he could, he excused himself, and went back to it to apologize. Slim Higgins joined him.

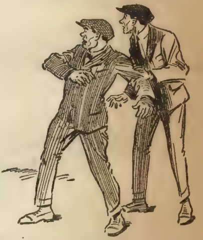
"Tell me, Dick? How'd you come to go ashore after McCune?"

Reasoner shifted his finger from "Hymen," which had stared at him blankly before when he opened the book at random in his dilemma, and turned to another. With a broad, calloused finger he pointed to it.

"Loyalty, Slim. See what it means—faith, allegiance, support. I'd been preaching that to Clay McCune, morning, noon and night, and then falling down on it myself, in my dealings with him. I got to thinking about it, and I went after him. But not soon enough, Slim," he finished sadly. "Not soon enough."



SKIRTS AND BRATS



By Louise Rice

IT HAD been arranged beforehand that "Smoke" Mike and "Larry the Dip" were to watch, at a discreet distance, for the arrival of "Red Jumbo," so that, if he failed to escape detection and detention, the rest of the gang might be notified of the fact at once.

Being inconspicuous criminals, so far unmugged by the police, they waited on the Norfolk wharf for the docking of the boat from New York; two units of the lounging, nondescript crowd of men and boys which that event always attracted. They knew that Red had been lying up, over McGurk's saloon, on West Third Street, long enough to grow a disguising beard; and as he had been in prison for three years previous to that, during which period none of the gang had seen him, they were prepared for some change in his appearance.

But although they kept their professionally keen eyes on the gangplank, he was almost abreast of them, and had sent the fleetest of winks in their direction before they recognized him, for he was most effectually disguised. He carried a baby girl, who held him tightly around the neck; to his right hand clung a second child, an exact duplicate of the first; and a frail, quiet-looking woman in faded mourning walked beside him. If Mike and Larry had beheld their pal calmly disembarking, accompanied by a baby elephant and six blue monkeys they could not have been more flabbergasted.

For once in their lives, they forgot to look furtively about for possible unfriendly minions of the law. Openly staring, they followed Red and his amazing *entourage* to the street car which would take them out to Ocean View, a sort of cheap Coney Island, where the gang had its headquarters over the saloon of McGurk, brother to their metropolitan ally.

Obeying Red Jumbo's one backward glance, they sank into rear seats, while he settled the woman and the children in the forward end of the car. Only when he had done so did he glance around, ostentatiously discover them, and wave them a greeting.

"Here's two of my frien's, now," he told the woman, rising. "I'll tell 'm you're comin' out."

"You are very kind, Mr. Gleason," she replied, "to take all this trou—here, Beulah—no, no, you must not bother our friend."

One of the children had slid from her seat and taken a tight hold of Jumbo's hand.

"Boolah go wiz 'oo," she stated, firmly.

One of Red Jumbo's famous scowls began to etch itself on his face, but before it could gather a definite outline something inside of him suddenly let out a chuckle.

"Aw, nev' mind," he said to the mother, and walked down the aisle with the little girl.

"Hello!" he greeted his gaping pals. "Meet m' frien', Miss Beulah Lawton. Shake hands, Beulah, wit' Mister Donovan an' Mister Carter."

Thus addressed by their own proper names, which were such conversational rarities that for a second they failed to identify themselves, both looked helplessly from the dainty little child to the grinning Jumbo, towering over them to his full six feet, two. They nodded, and he sat down, facing them.

"What the'—" Smoke Mike began, and paused, bereft of speech.

Larry the Dip, whose correct speech and thin-lipped, narrow face told of a different birth from the other two, put out his small white hand to the baby, who surveyed it thoughtfully, shook hands, and smiled. Then she hoisted herself into Jumbo's arms, where she snuggled comfortably.

"This ain't no glad hand I'm gettin', seems t' me," Red remarked, and laughed.

"Oh, spill it, spill it!" urged Smoke Mike, jogging an exasperated foot. "W'atinell's all this, anyway, Red? Whatcha doin' wit' skoits an' brats?"

"'S all right, Smoke. I ain't as nutty's I look. Here's th' dope, straight. Th' dick on th' boat almost got wise t' me, las' night. I stalled 'im by playin' up them. They—" he looked down at the child's curls and choked over the absurd statement—"they kinda took t' me. Yeah—'n you can laugh, like th' boneheads you are, but that fixed 'im. He knows, same as all th' bulls, that I never run with dolls, so he played me for some hick, an' went t' bed. An' 'Ol Squeeze' was on hand, this mornin'. He mighta nipped me, maybe, but not the way I was. See?"

The two who listened nodded gravely. Old Squeeze, otherwise the head of the Norfolk plain-clothes men, is a terror to the underworld.

"But whatcha bringin' em along fer?" Smoke demanded.

Red glanced down cautiously at the child, who had begun to doze.

"I'll tell you," he said, impressively, "an' you won't have no comeback. In them cold rags she's got on—" all three looked toward the woman in the plain black—the "cold rags" of Red's speech—"there's—five — t'ousand — papers. Yeah! She's goin' t' put it inta a chicken farm, somewheres around here. Usta live down this way. Chickens—huh? I told 'er I was goin' t' visit frien's an' she could stop wit 'em till she got settled. An' there ain't no one in th' woild knows much about 'er, or will look fer 'er. See? It's easy!"

"Aw, is it?" Smoke objected. "Whatcha goin' t' do? I t'ought yuh was nix on th' rough stuff."

"Who's talkin' about it?"

"We have only today left before the job, Red," Larry remarked, in his smooth, cultured voice. "We shall have to clear tonight. All but Maggie. We framed her to stay and give the stall."

"That's all right," Red Jumbo assured him. "That's fixed. It's like this."

Finger by finger, he began checking off the plan.

"When we get to the View, I'll take 'em to some eats. I kept 'em away from it on th' boat on poipose. You an' Smoke let th' bunch know. Chase Tim an' 'Doc' and 'Spuds,' foist. Then smooth th' shack. I told 'er m' frien's was kinda rough, so she ain't lookin' for no kid-glove outfit, but the place has to look right—un'erstand? Tell Maggie I said so. An' she's Mrs. Mason, remember. All o' you, take your own monikers. See? Put th' pitchers an' th' bones an' all that away, an' wise up McGurk, an' cut out th' juice—un'nerstand? And tell Maggie t' get th' ice off her."

Silent, his friends followed his enumerating fingers and nodded their comprehension, but looked their doubt. Red answered as though they had spoken.

"Well, we don't pull off the job till about t'ree. Them swell hops never gets goin' till after midnight. T'ree'll be right. They'll be dancin' and eatin', then. You got the layout, all right?"

"Tim got it," Larry replied. "He's been flirting with the madame's maid. A handsome blighter is certainly useful in our business, Red."

"Yeah." Red was used to Larry's way of talking. "Well, now, lookit. We'll get 'er to bed about 'leven, anyway. An' we'll have cawfee or somethin' fer her t' drink, an' sleep 'er—ten hours?"

He looked at Larry, the official knock-out man of the gang, and a real expert in his line.

"I can sleep her for just as long or as short as you say, Red," he stated, with the sureness of genius in its knowledge.

"Yeah—I know. A'right. How about you, Smoke? Got somethin'?"

Smoke, machinist, chauffeur, safe-blower and counterfeiter, the oldest and most experienced all-around man in the gang, but not brainy enough for a leader, smiled with satisfaction.

"I gotta bird of a car fer th' getaway," he said. "When I get 'er out a ways an' fix 'er up, th' bulls'll never spot 'er. She's stored in a barn back o' the View. Owner's in Noo York. She won't be looked fer fer a while. Th' hick that owns th' barn don't use it."

"A'right. Well, we'll sleep th' skoit, an' take th' money. Then we'll load 'er in th' car when we start, an' th' kids wit' 'er. They never squeel if I'm along. They—"

For the briefest of moments something clouded his reddish-brown eyes, which matched and complemented his fiery thatch. Smoke Mike did not notice it, but Larry did.

"So that's a'right," Jumbo went on, quickly. "You gonna wait fer me back o' th' greenhouse? Yeah—I won't be long. That safe's one o' th' kind I'm usta. Along toward mornin' we'll spill 'er an' th' kids out, an' when she wakes up, she won't know how she got there. Maggie'll be gone by then from th' shack, an' th' bulls'll be up a tree. Besides, it'll take 'er a while t' get back. It'll have t' be near a house, though. They gotta have somethin' t' eat——"

He frowned and looked uneasily at the sleeping child.

"I don't like this gag, Red," Smoke said, following the glance. "I'm leary of it."

Red Jumbo threw up his head and narrowed his eyes.

"We'll go t'rough wit' it th' way I say," he returned. The finality of his tone, and the domineering look he bent on his two companions explained why he had kept the leadership of the gang through his absence from them. "That five t'ousand'll keep us for a mont'. We won't have t' give up to ol' Isaacstein till th' papers stop yellin' an' that's when th' bulls'll stop huntin', much, an' we'll get more'n double if we wait."

SMOKE AND LARRY nodded, thoughtfully. The funds of the gang were far lower than they should have been, in view of the big job they had on hand—the looting of a famous country house near Norfolk, where a ball was to be held, that night. If they were forced to dispose of the booty to the "fence" who was usually allied with them, but who squeezed them of every possible cent, while the hue and cry was still in full force, they would be robbed, as usual.

But if they could scatter, each with enough money to live on for a month or so—yes, Red was right. It was worth added trouble and risk, that five thousand dollars. As they thought of it, their faces brightened. This was what it was to have the right kind of a leader. During Red's absence their pickings had been very meager.

Red Jumbo, used to watching faces, knew what their decision was before they gave him the curt nods which settled it. Without another word he rose, carrying the sleeping child, and went forward to the woman who welcomed him with a very pleasant smile.

Blonde Maggie won the admiration of both men by her instant comprehension of what was wanted.

"Leave it to me," she commanded, before they were half through, "we only got a few minutes." and thereafter she drove them with an energy which left them breathless.

They finished just as Red came along the boardwalk. Maggie and Larry hastily checked over each detail, while Smoke watched from a window to signal a nearer approach of the visitors; cards and dice, paper-backed novels, pictures from The Police Gazette tacked on the walls, dirt from the corners, glasses and many bottles from the sideboard, Maggie's red silk waist from her back—all, all were gone.

Maggie, denuded of some of her yellow hair, and of most of her paint, and with all the ice stripped from her fingers and ears, looked so different that Larry had stopped, several times, to look at her with astonishment.

"Remember, now, Smoke," she said, impressively, "I'm Mrs. Mason, and you're my brother, Mike Donovan. You work on the roller-coasters, in the season, and I run a peanut-stand. You, Larry—what are you?"

A smile, sophisticated, sad and grim, flitted over Larry's mobile lips.

"I am just what I was when you knew me first," he replied, "a young fellow from one of the F. F. V.'s who had taken to coke and inferior society."

Maggie was not sensitive, as a rule, but some color which had not come in a box stained her cheek at Larry's remark. He noticed it, but before he could utter the punctilious apology which his early training brought to his lips, Red, the woman and the children were in the room.

Larry and Maggie, together, saved the first half-hour from being one of extreme constraint, for Smoke, afraid of saying something out of character, contented himself with mumbling, and Jumbo, into whose lap both the children had promptly crawled, was acutely and most uncomfortably self-conscious, despite the fact that the situation was of his own bringing about.

What he had not counted on was the effect it had upon himself, nor the queer atmosphere it had brought upon the rooms which usually echoed to profanity and smelled of tobacco and whisky. He kept remembering the last time he had been there, just before he was "nabbed." There had been a fight, that night.

And now, here were all sorts of things, changed by a woman and two babies. There was Maggie, without the inevitable cigaret, without the flash of diamonds—Maggie in a white waist and an oddly subdued manner. There was Larry, talking the way Larry could, but seldom did; there was Smoke, silent, with clean hands; there was McGurk, sneaking up the back stairs to look at the new arrival, and remaining to stare, open-mouthed, at Jumbo, until a scowl sent him scurrying below, but not without the upward flung echo of a laugh. And, most of all, there was the amazing, the disconcerting, the incredible sensation of two warm little bodies, snuggled against him, and the fragrance of their dainty little selves in his nostrils.

It got on toward noon. Usually, McGurk sent up a lunch from the saloon below to as many of the gang as might be on hand. What should be done under these circumstances? Red Jumbo, gradually getting over his state—or, rather, getting used to it—raised his eyebrows at Maggie, but it was the mother of the twins who answered the question which they were all asking themselves.

"I've been smelling your dinner for some time, Mrs. Mason," she said, "and I know you want to go and look after it. You'll let me help, won't you?"

For a moment, Maggie looked helplessly at Red. The meal was cooking in the kitchen of the saloon. Then her woman's inventiveness came to her aid.

"Why, the truth is, that ain't my dinner," she acknowledged. "I've been over to my sister's in Norfolk all week, an' I just got home before you and R— and Mr. Gleason arrived. I ain't got a thing in the house, I'm sorry to say, but I thought, soon as you was feeling at home, I'd go out and——"

Little Mrs. Lawton, with a gay smile, and a child-like clap of her hands, interrupted her.

"Let me! Let me!" she cried. "I've been living in a boarding-house for two years, ever since my husband died, and I'm just homesick for a cook-stove! I want to buy everything, and cook it. Don't say I can't!"

They couldn't do anything with her. She swept everything before her with enthusiasm, with good comradeship. She found a basket big and strong, in which McGurk usually sent up bottles; she insisted that Maggie tell her what was lacking in the larder; she tied a towel around Smoke's waist and set him to peeling potatoes against her return; and before they knew how she had done it she had carried off Jumbo, bearing the basket and a sheepish expression, on shopping intent.

"I dunno w'atinell's struck Red," Smoke complained, as he went at his task, "this skoit's actin' 's though she owned him. I hope she's got the wad Red says she has."

Maggie did not answer. She was laying the table with linen and silver, hastily requisitioned from McGurk, remembering some old forms which had not occurred to her for many a day. Larry went down to the corner, where there was a cheap florist and brought back a big bunch of the small, yellow roses which are Virginia's most distinctive flower.

Maggie sniffed the spicy odor thoughtfully.

"We usta have a big bush of these," she said, to nobody in particular. Larry turned quickly and looked out of the window. He did not want his face to be seen just then. There had been a long row of those big bushes before a big, pillared house where his memory sometimes strayed.

Beulah and Lulu, confided to Maggie's care by their mother, trotted after the girl, asking questions, getting in her way, and sometimes imperiously demanding to be kissed. Once, without their asking, Maggie stooped and gathered them fiercely into her arms, but they were not frightened. They hugged back with their strong little arms, and kissed her tenderly, when they saw tears in her eyes.

Mrs. Lawton brought back a basket filled to the brim, and a strangely silent man. But she, herself, bubbled over with good spirits. She praised Smoke's pile of potatoes, she put the chickens she had brought on to roast, she set Larry to shelling peas, she asked Maggie for her "favorite recipe," she declared nothing in the world had ever looked as good to her as those Virginia roses; and, that the culinary operations might be unhampered, she put the twins into Jumbo's capacious arms for safe-keeping.

Somewhere Maggie had unearthed two aprons; somehow, straightening the window shades and setting chairs and bureaus to rights, Maggie had contrived to give the place such a domestic look that Red felt himself actually abashed before it. He and Larry and Smoke sat together, smelling homelike odors and listening to the bits of conversation which drifted out of the kitchen. How Beulah had had the measles last year, and did Maggie think the largest chicken was browning too fast, and were there good dry-goods stores in Norfolk now, and where was the potato-masher?

Casual, unimportant woman-talk, all that, but very, very strange to the ears of two of the men who listened. To Larry, it was not strange, but it was dreadful. To Smoke, it was queer, but unmeaning. To Jumbo, who had never heard its like before, it was a part of the confusion which was slowly taking its grip upon his soul.

THE dinner was an unqualified success, even to Smoke, who surveyed the glass of water beside his plate with extreme distaste. But before he could say anything the twins, solemnly folding their fat hands, bowed their heads and murmured:

"For yis meal, God make us tooly sankful. Amen!"

Maggie and Larry and Red, who had hastily ducked their heads, in accord with Mrs. Lawton's, were crimson at the conclusion of the little ceremony; especially as they met the sardonic grin of Smoke who had chosen to fill in time by eating the coleslaw at his plate.

They lingered over the meal, strangely loath to break up the association of the table. It was fairly quiet. The season had not really opened, yet, and most of the "attractions" at the beach were still closed. The late afternoon sun came slithering in while they still sat on. Beulah and Lulu, despite their mother's remonstrance, had returned to Jumbo's lap.

"I haven't felt so happy since poor Tom was taken from me," Mrs. Lawton said.

She pushed back her chair, humming a tune. She broke off a rose and pushed it through her heavy dark hair. There was a beautiful, faint color in her cheeks and her eyes were sweet and deep. She had probably never been beautiful, but she was something more compelling than that; she shone with a sort of glory. Red Jumbo looked at her so steadily that she blushed a little. Then, swiftly, she turned around to the piano, and broke out into a clear haunting contralto.

She sang "Absent," and "Juanita," and "Old Black Joe," "The Harbor Bar" and "Rocked In The Cradle of The Deep." Every time that she stopped and swung around they begged her to go on. They leaned forward in their chairs, as the twilight settled on them, and gave themselves up to her, and she took their hearts with her, far, far from anything they had ever known. Then, when it was too dark to see, she began something, and the two children, stirring, piped up with her——

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Smoke snorted and tramped down-stairs, but Maggie and Larry and Jumbo, shadows in their chairs, did not move, and Mrs. Lawton, when that song was done, began "Nearer my God to Thee."

She got up after she had finished that.

"I reckon that will be good night for the babies," she remarked, casually. "And you folks must be tired of listening to me."

She moved toward the door, but Beulah and Lulu objected. They wanted to be kissed "dood night;" they wanted to hug Jumbo; they wanted "Mis'er Lawy" to go as far as the hall; they wanted "Aunt Maggie" to promise to tuck them in.

"I'm afraid my little girls are too wilful," the mother said, over her shoulder, as she finally led them away. "I've spoiled them, maybe."

They could hear her singing, in Maggie's room, as she undressed the babies. After a while Maggie lit the gas.

Smoke came up the stairs, treading lightly.

"Jes' bin out t' look around," he whispered. "Doc an' Tim's come in. Say, ain't dis skoit de limit?"

No one replied. He looked from one face to the other, puzzled.

"Say, what's eatin' youse? Yuh look like a bunch o' rummies."

Still no one spoke. Then Jumbo lifted his head, and licked his dry lips several times; swallowed and stood up.

"You—you keep yore tongue off'n 'er!" he said huskily.

"Aw, is that so?" Smoke sneered. "Whadcha do? Fall fer de skoit?"

Jumbo's blazing eyes menaced him.

"Shut up!" he ordered, with a warning glance toward the bedroom.

Mrs. Lawton was still singing a little.

Smoke's mean little eyes narrowed.

"S-a-a-y," he drawled, "w'at's de gag?"

Jumbo opened and shut his big hands.

"I started this, an' I'm goin' t'rough wit' it my way. See? I—she—I dunno how it's goin' t' lay—but I ain't goin' t' have any—I ain't goin' t' take 'er wad, an' that goes. See?"

"An' I s'pose de rest is in on dis?" Smoke demanded.

Jumbo looked at the other two. Larry nodded, his lips set in a thin, hard line. Maggie whimpered.

"I ain't had a kid around for years," she said.

Jumbo brought his eyes back to Smoke.

"Yeah—" he said, and in his excitement forgot to keep his voice lowered. "An' w'at's more, I ain't goin t'rough wit' t'night, either. I'm—I ain't goin' to. That's all."

There was a slight, a very slight movement of Smoke's right hand and something shining lay in it.

"I t'ought yuh was fallin' fer de skoit," he growled. "I seen yuh. Yah! Yuh make me sick! Yuh better change yore mind, quick, 'r yuh won't have none left t'change, for I'll drill yore bean. Yuh can't put dis over. D'yuh t'ink de rest o' de gang's goin' t' lose out jes' fer a skoit an' brats? Take it from me, yuh'l go t'rough wit' it, 'r I'll drill yuh, 'n yuh needn't be lookin' like—I got de drop on yuh, an'——"

"And I have the drop on you, Smoke," said a very quiet voice from the doorway. "Move your hand an inch and I'll shoot it off."

Like automatons, they wheeled; their jaws simultaneously fell open. Mrs. Lawton was in the room, with a large, businesslike revolver in what each one of them saw was a practised hand.

"What th'—" Smoke began, and lowered his weapon.

He was an indifferent shot. Only the fact that he was sure Red Jumbo was unarmed had allowed him to call the turn on him. But he knew that this woman could and would do what she said, though how and why. . . .

"Put it on the floor," she ordered.

He did it. She motioned that he should stand back by the stairs. Then she looked at the others.

"They used to call me 'Chicago Bessie,'" she announced, simply.

A murmur, an indrawn breath, answered her. Chicago Bessie! The slickest confidence-woman in the business. One of the cleverest, coolest female crooks known to the underworld.

Jumbo took a stiff step nearer to her.

"So—you was stallin'," he said. "You—" he laughed. "Huh! I t'ought—somethin' diff'rent."

"No, I wasn't stalling," her reply was to him, alone. "I got into bad ways when I married Tom. I guess you people didn't know him. He'd have been a good man if he hadn't been so weak. And I was young. But I was raised right, Jumbo. Just as I told you, on a farm near here. I never got sent up until two years before Tom died. The babies were only three months old. It nearly killed me. And when I got out last year he was dead and they had been boarding with a good woman. The first night I was home, they knelt down and said their prayers at my knees. And I changed. That's all."

Her eyes were filling, filling, and a sob which she could not control broke in her throat.

"Whadcha come here wit' me for?"

"I knew who you were."

"You——"

He fell back a step, and his face darkened.

"If yore workin' wit' th' bulls—" he began.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" Smoke croaked, and moved, only to stop, midway of his crouch for his weapon.

"I've still got the drop on you, Smoke," Chicago Bessie told him, "and I don't have to see to shoot straight."

She fumbled with her left hand for her handkerchief, and wiped away her tears.

"Fer Gawd's sake, tell me th' trut'!" Jumbo implored. "I gotta know!"

"I knew you on the boat," she said. "You were pointed out to me, once. And I knew about the gang, too, and I took a chance. I—I told you I'd changed. I've tried to get hold of people that had gone wrong— I've tried to do a little good. I left my money with the purser, and I came out here with you hoping I could do or say something—or that God would let my little girls soften your hearts——"

It seemed that she could not go on. And then she dropped to her knees.

"Oh, my dear Lord!" she prayed. "I don't know what to say to these dear people, but You know what I want. I want them for You. That's why I came. I—help me. Tell me what to say!"

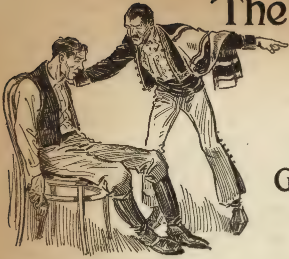
Cursing, Smoke turned and tramped loudly down the stairs, slamming the street door after him. Larry and Maggie, who were crying, knelt down. Chicago Bessie looked up at Jumbo.

"And you?" she asked.

"GOING WEST"

by HUGH PENDEXTER

"GOING WEST," as used by the men overseas to mean death, is of peculiarly American origin, aboriginal American origin. The Karok Indians of California believed the spirit of the good Karok went to the "happy western land." The Cherokee myths picture the west as the "ghost country," the twilight land where go the dead. The Shawnee tell of the boy who "traveled west" to find his sister in the spirit land. The Chippewa believed the spirit "followed a wide, beaten path toward the west." The spirit world of the Fox Indians is at the setting of the sun. And so on, in the theology of many Indian Nations we find the "West" as the storied abode of the great majority—who have passed over.



The Greaser

By

Gordon Young
& Jack Holt

THIS happened between sunset and dawn one night, not on, but rather close to, the Mexican border where José Juarez, the gambler, somewhat tentatively held a place of respect for himself in the Tarantula Dance and Gambling Hall. José was quiet, unobtrusive. He had hard eyes and nimble fingers and wore his holster high on the left of his breast in such a way that it was concealed by the serape always thrown across the shoulder.

Doug Walsh, who was suspected of having more notches on his guns—he packed two—than graves he had filled, but who nevertheless was with good reason feared, sometimes boasted that he would shortly find out just how quickly that greaser could draw. But for some cause or other he, like the cowboys that flocked around the bar and grumbled about a Mexican treating himself as their equal, hesitated to come to gun-play; although, Heaven knows, there was excuse enough to pick a quarrel since Louise Lawton often turned from one of them to dance with him.

Louise was a queer girl: pretty of course, or there wouldn't have been anything to quarrel over. But she was different from the other girls. Perhaps not prettier, for beauty is a matter of taste; but she seemed to understand men better—that is, she perhaps better understood all of them excepting her own brother, and everybody but her knew that he was worse than no good, being a cheat, a coward, a liar, a kind of sickly weakling in body and soul.

He was weak rather than evil, which is a poor apology for a fellow who, even as he promised his sister not to gamble was wheedling money out of her for no other purpose; and who pulled with Doug Walsh—when everybody knew that Sheriff Clifford was keeping suspicious eyes on that desperado—and merely grinned nervously at the abuse Walsh piled on to him; and who had been caught stealing from a drunken man's pocket—there is no need to recite what all else. But to Louise he was her "brother," and that kept him from having his neck wrung a dozen times a month.

And she was under the delusion that he was her protector! That the reason men were more respectful to her was because she, alone of all the girls at the Tarantula, had a brother.

Louise was rather short, of irrepressible vitality and vivid. Her hair was black and her eyes blue, and she wore a short scarlet skirt, black silk stockings, tiny slippers with glittering brass buckles. Sometimes her low-necked waists were of black, sometimes of yellow, silk. The men did not paw her over, even when they had been drinking. She knew how to evade unwelcome caresses without giving offense. She knew how to keep men at arm's length even though the very exclusion heightened the desire for contact. As has been said, she understood men.

She detested Doug Walsh and continued to be friendly with José Juarez, though she knew that the Mexican was intensely in love with her and sometimes annoyed her with talk about marriage; but he was a wonderful dancer, always respectful, and had "something" about him—which was poise, though she probably had never heard the word—that she liked.

She suspected that Juarez was a halfbreed, but he wore the picturesque Mexican dress; velvet trousers, sewn with silver buttons up the side, a jacket of black velvet trimmed with buttons and silver embroidery, and a white ruffled shirt. He also wore the small, made-to-order boots and large, decorated sombrero of the horseman though he seldom rode, and did not own a horse. When one stays up all night there is little inclination for the saddle the next day.

Louise had time and again asked José not to play cards with her brother. Louise did not know it, but Charles falsely attributed all of his losses at cards to the Mexican—though he did lose, and often all he had, every time he played with José, for the gambler knew from whence Charles got most of his money. A queer thing, too: José never seemed to have any luck if he sat in a game where Louise chanced to be playing—but she, she had to make a pocketbook of her skirt to carry home the winnings.

"Charley," Louise said after she had scooted off the dance-floor to evade Doug Walsh, and found her brother across from the Mexican at a table in an alcove, "you promised me you wouldn't play again!"

"Aw, I'm not playing. Just penny ante."

Charles was nervous. José had noticed it. He had noticed too that several times during the evening Charles and Doug Walsh slipped into the shadows, and José, spying with catlike, inscrutable eyes, surmised that the gunman was either trying to bully Charles into doing something, or to hold him to a promise that had already been forced out of him. Charles would promise almost anybody anything.

He himself had pulled Charles away from the bar where Thomas, a nester with a homestead about five miles out on the Lone Piñon Road, was foolishly buying drinks from a wad that represented a successful alfalfa crop—incidentally, while Mrs. Thomas sat with the dull patience of a work-worn woman, nursing a few-months-old baby, in a buckboard out in front and waited. José thought it better for Charles to be gambling mildly with him than brewing deviltry with Doug Walsh.

José had two and a half crosses cut on the handle of his gun. He had cut the half cross one night when Louise had slapped Doug Walsh's face and had then coolly stared down the bad man though both of his guns had leaped from their holsters.

The half of a cross had not been cut, however, until after José had said expectantly to Charles—

"The son of a skunk has insulted your sister."

Charles had concealed his fear and agitation under a pitiable attempt at unconcern.

"Aw, Doug didn't mean nothing. He's a good fellow. Lou is too —— touchy anyway."

Charles had averted his face as he said it. José had hard eyes to stare into.

But one good thing about Charles: he was not a trouble-maker, a tale-bearer. He never told Doug what the Mexican said, or any of the other insulting remarks that José let fall. Doug would have gone loco if he had known what José was saying of him even when Louise came up.

"Well, quit right now," she told her brother, who had tried to fend off her protest with the excuse of "penny ante." "And you tell Doug Walsh that if he isn't looking for trouble to keep his dirty hands off me. You have to make him stop that rough stuff, Charley——"

"Pardon me," José interrupted softly—his voice was ever smooth as velvet, almost musical, "but if you will permit, I shall take pleasure in speaking to him for you."

"Thanks, José," she answered, playfully tossing a rose petal toward him. "I've heard that before."

"But, señorita," José said, standing up resolutely.

"No, no. Sit down. Charley will tell him again. And José, promise me you won't play with Charley any more—tonight at least. He hasn't any money, anyway."

"No," Charles answered in an injured tone, "but you have. I'd have cleaned him tonight if I'd have had anything to bet. Gee, I'd bet a wad big as Thomas' on the hand 'fore this."

"I will promise," José said to her, and added with a smile, "that is, as long as I know he hasn't any money."

When Louise walked away Charles followed her. He was back in a few minutes and coaxing the gambler to play. But José refused. Others in plenty were playing poker.

"She'll spot me," Charles lamented, "about the second hand. Hey, you," he called to a cowboy, Jim of the Frying Pan outfit, "give me that lid and coat of yours and I'll sit with my back to the door."

Jim was one of those who liked Louise very much.

"I'll give you the coat," he said, for the evening was warm and he was ready to shed the unaccustomed garment anyway. "But not this J. B. It's new. Get José's rain tent. It'll hide you."

And José permitted Charles to take the sombrero, with its embroidery and silver band worth about thirty times as much as Jim's new Stetson; and Charles cast his own hat toward a corner and sitting down with his back to the dance-hall door, began to play.

An hour later Doug Walsh, who had looked all over the place for him, discovered Charles.

"Come on. We'll have to ride like ——. Whatchu tryin' to do? Hide out from me in that rig? Thomas' been gone quarter of an hour 'r more."

II

SOME time after midnight, fifteen or twenty minutes past, José cashed in at the game he was playing and started to go out on the dance-floor to find Louise; and he bumped into Charles.

"Where is my som——"

He got no further. Charles pushed back the hat—his own—that he was wearing as he excitedly flashed a fist-full of currency in the gambler's face.

"Come on. You know I got some money now. I owe you a trimmin'—'bout a dozen of 'em."

José shook his head thoughtfully.

"Don't be a piker."

José remembered the time Louise had sold her ring, a small diamond that Sheriff Clifford had bought for a watch charm—not because he wanted it, either; except that he thought Louise needed the money—and Charles had got that money and lost it in a game that José did not happen to sit in.

"All right," José said imperturbably, "we'll get off in a corner and have a little stud."

"That's me. I want to get some action for my money. I'll show you where to head in, too. Believe me."

As they passed by the bar, looking for an empty poker-room, Doug Walsh was uproariously calling everybody up to have a drink.

José heard him, but pretended not to, and walked on.

He did not hear what Doug Walsh said, for Walsh, who had been buying and drinking recklessly, had seen. It took all of the persuasion of Joe and Jim—called the Twins of the Frying-Pan—to induce Walsh to postpone the threats that he poured out against the blankety-blankety-blankety-blank greaser. Doug was in a fighting mood and looking for trouble.

One reason was that he knew he had almost everybody bluffed; another, that he had plenty of money, and the man with money, whether in the barroom or in the Wall Street bank, seems to think it his privilege to be insulting when in the least crossed. But he talked so much about what he was going to do, and how he was going to do it, to the B. B. B. B. greaser that he forgot what he was talking about and continued to buy drinks.

In the meantime José and young Lawton were playing stud. The gambler, who always appeared on the verge of being bored, and scarcely ever seemed to take much interest in the game, sat quietly watching the cards fall.

He never looked more than once at the card faced down, and then barely glimpsed the pip, and made his bets nonchalantly as the others fell face-upward.

Charles, who had a mania for gambling, peeped at the hole card, as though to assure himself that it hadn't changed spots, every time a new card was dealt.

Charles had been getting some good hands, and was betting strong—as he always did. Once he had bluffed—or thought he had bluffed—José out when the Mexican had him beat in sight.

José had smiled slightly. It had been his deal. The next time that it was his deal Charles got an ace in the hole, and two more aces fell with the third card dealt. José had only a deuce and four in sight.

"I'll let you down easy to coax you along," Charles said, shoving in a small piece of silver.

No man would—or at least should—stand for a heavy bet with a pair of aces against him when at most he could have nothing more than a pair of fours with only two cards more to be drawn.

"If I remember correctly," José said softly, "you stole a pot for me a few minutes ago. Now climb aboard this," and he pushed a few bills into the center of the table.

Charles, as anybody would have done, came back with a raise. José saw it, and dealt.

Charles got a ten-spot, and José paired the four.

"Three fours beat a pair of aces," José remarked.

Charles took another squint at the hole card, bet, was raised, raised again, and was met.

The last card gave Charles a three-spot; and José paired the deuce in sight.

"Of all the luck!" Charles muttered, taking another peep at his ace in the hole and trying to appear down-hearted.

José bet—he not only bet, but he tapped Charles' pile; then flipped over the hole card and revealed the third deuce.

"You are the luckiest gre——"

But Charles did not finish. He had caught the glint in José's eyes.

"Señor," José said stiffly, "I was born north of the Rio Grande. I am an American."

Charles protested that he didn't mean anything, that he knew José was the best fellow in ten lands, and wound up by borrowing a few dollars from him.

As José sorted the bills he noticed one, almost half-gone. A twenty-dollar bill it was, that had been torn in the middle, or nearly in the middle, but he put it in with the rest, making a separate roll of the bills taken from Charles.

A few minutes later, a half-hour or so, Louise declared she had never played in such luck in her life. She too noticed the torn bill as she took the pot from José; and the others about the table marveled that this Mexican gambler, who made a fat living off the green-clothed tables, should have been trimmed by a girl that always showed it in her face when she had a good hand.

III

WHEN Mrs. Thomas staggered into the dance-hall, the babe in her arms, and weakly told her story there was cursing and clattering of feet, shouting among the men and hysterical, high-voiced horror and sympathy from the girls, and presently the furious beat of hoofs as Sheriff Clifford and the cowboys dashed away in the night to the scene of the murder.

"Me and Bill was ridin' along home," she said, the tears gushing afresh down along the dried stains on her dusty, thin face. "An' he was singin' loud 'cause he'd had a little too much 'fore we started, an' I was feedin' it again 'cause it had the colic somethin' awful an' had been cryin'; and then I heard somebody ridin' fast an' they shouted to Bill to stop. I thought I heard two hosses, but I didn't see nobody but one feller. Bill said 'Go to ——,' an' whipped up the hosses. Then they started shootin'. Bill was shootin' an' a-drivin' like mad.

"All of a sudden he jest says 'My Gawd!' an' throwed up both hands an' fell off, an' I knowed they'd got him. I tried to get the reins, but havin' it I missed 'em, and the hosses turned out an' upset the wagon, an' I thought I was killed. But I heard it cryin', an' it don't 'pear to be hurt none, jest scratched. Pore little thing! Its father—I—I—found Bill—an'—then—I jest had to git here—oh, God, what will I do?"

Louise had taken the baby. The sickly little tired thing had cried itself into exhaustion, and the side of its tender face and body was red and black from the fall. Some one brought a chair for the mother who was weeping on the shoulder of a kneeling girl—a girl whose shoulders were bare, and whose lips and cheeks were covered with paint—that held Mrs. Thomas' head and tried with phrases that came strangely in her hoarse, coarse voice to comfort the stricken woman.

In seconds rather than minutes the dance-hall was emptied of men. José, the bartender and Charles remained. José and the bartender had no horses; and Charles had been sent for a drink of water and continued to hold the glass after Mrs. Thomas had drunk from it.

At the bartender's suggestion Mrs. Thomas was taken into a room off the bar where he had a cot; and all the girls crowded in there, too, futilely and flutteringly trying to do something, while he got a little wine for her.

The baby began to cry, and Louise holding it tightly and tenderly to her breast left the room and walked up and down the dance-floor. The dance-hall was deserted except for José, who stood thoughtfully by a window staring out into the darkness, and for Charles who sat on a chair, still holding the glass, but with his head bent down on to his chest.

From somewhere Doug Walsh appeared. He had spent his last dollar some minutes before Mrs. Thomas came with her poignant story, but declaring that he knew where he could get plenty more money, he had gone out again and dug up a tin can that had had buried about three hours before. He had heard shouting and riding, and wondered at it; he was surprised to find the dance-hall empty, but though he had a suspicion as to what had happened he did not care. Nobody would suspect him. ——, no! It had been an inspiration on his part that had made him knock off that sombrero Charles had worn and leave it on the road. Doug was feeling fine.

He swaggered up to Louise, pointed in jest an accusing finger at the babe, and asked—

"Yours, eh?"

Louise looked at him in angry amazement; it was not the insult to her—she was a dance-hall girl—but the utter brutality of jesting over a babe when the blood of its murdered father was scarcely cold.

"Well," Doug went on, gloating over his humor, "any time you want another——"

"Charley!" she cried. "You hear this dog!"

And she ran from the room.

Doug turned toward Charles and laughed insultingly. He laughed the louder when also he noticed José standing by young Lawton.

"Going to kill him?" José whispered softly, tensely.

A shudder perceptibly quivered through Charles' body.

"We must make her think you are a man—anyway," José said as he looked up toward the approaching Doug.

"Yes, I heard you, you —— greaser. I've had about enough out of you, and here's where——"

As the desperado broke off, he reached for his guns; he had gripped the handles while José's fingers were still softly tapping the buttons of his jacket; and then in one movement so swift as almost to elude observation, José's right hand flashed upward toward his left shoulder as the other hand pulled aside the serape—the shot was fired as Doug's guns swung clear of their holsters. But only one shot was fired, and Doug fell like a dropped stone with a black hole squarely in the center of his forehead.

"Here—you—quick," José had said to Charles, even as he had shot; and he pressed the boy's trembling fingers about the big white ivory handle of the revolver, and then leaped aside so that the scared-faced girls that rushed in were in time to see the revolver still smoking, even as Charles looked down at it in a kind of dull amazement.

But José, his fingers gently tapping the bright buttons of his jacket, stood some four feet away, his face emotionless, inscrutable as ever.

"Ask Louise why the boy borrowed my gun," José said to the bartender who shoved his way past the girls.

Every one knew that Charles was unarmed. But though they might wonder, and they did, they could not doubt their eyes: Charles had killed the gunman, and in a square fight, for Doug Walsh was facing him and had both guns out of their holsters.

Louise hastily gave the baby to some one else and fell weeping in a mingling of horror and gratification about the neck of her bewildered brother.

IV

WHEN Sheriff Clifford followed by an angry crowd came through the Tarantula doorway the first object that every one saw was the sombrero in his hand.

José raised his arms above his head; it was dangerous to hesitate or make a false move before that mob of angry faces.

"That shows it, the coward! Admits it! Greaser! Lynchin's too good!" and kindred remarks ran in whispers, undertones and shouts through the room.

"Señores—" José began.

"Shut up!" the sheriff said. "I'll do the talkin'. This—" shaking the sombrero—"was there. And some of the fellers say you had quite a wad on you tonight—bills. We know you always draw gold from the bank——

"But let me—" José began again.

"You can't explain nothing," voices, menacing voices, called out.

At the word "bills," Louise reached under her skirts and removed the bulging object just below her garter. A few people crowded around her to see.

"Señores," José said, though shouts and jeers came at him, "I have not worn the sombrero all evening. You remember—" he addressed Jim of the Frying-Pan outfit—"that I gave it to Charles and——"

Jim was an honest fellow. He believed the greaser was guilty, but he admitted that what he had said was true.

"I give it back," Charles muttered huskily.

In his hand was still the heavy, ivory-handled revolver of José's.

Right then Charles' word was unquestioned, unquestionable; for it had been rapidly spread among the returning posse that Charles in a fair fight had killed Doug Walsh, whose unattended body lay on a table in one of the poker-rooms.

"An' by all that's holy," shouted the bartender, plucking a half of a twenty-dollar bill from Louise's hand. "Here's the very bill Thomas tore t'night. Lit a cigaret with half of it, an' tried to git me to break the other half—this very bill! I wouldn't do it!"

"That settles it!" a voice cried, and the men nodded sternly one to another.

Then some one jerked Sheriff Clifford's gun from his holster, and Joe of the Frying-Pan put his own gun squarely into the sheriff's face, saying:

"Now, Sheriff, there ain't no man we-all respect more'n you, but there ain't goin' to be no 'law take its course' in this. We're going to hang this greaser to a sycamore down there'n the grove. Ain't that right, boys?"

Oaths, nods, and a few "That's rights" given in even, solemn voices made answer; the death sentence was thereby delivered. It was not a mob, it was a small band suddenly grown quiet, stern, in the awful dignity that comes over men when they pass death-judgment on a fellow-man.

In the hushed tenseness the impact of all eyes was on the face of José, and some hearts shamed the breasts they were in by beating the quicker in a kind of vagrant admiration for a man who could look back at them with cold steady gaze. His face was inscrutable; for all the fear revealed he might have been in a game watching a drunken man bluffing against a pat hand.

He turned his head, he spoke quietly, and Charles—with averted face—trembled as with ague when he heard José ask:

"Have you nothing to say, señor? You know they will not listen to me."

Charles did not answer.

Joe of the Frying-Pan took the rope that Jim had brought him, put a loop around José's neck, drew it snug but not tight, and without a word started out of the door. The men gave way, and fell into line behind the gambler who still held his hands above his head.

"You won't make no rumpus?" one of the two men detailed to watch Sheriff Clifford asked.

"I know it wouldn't do no good," the sheriff acknowledged, saying the only thing he would without admitting that he was glad the law was not to be permitted to take its course in punishing so dastardly a crime.

And they started out.

Faintly, faintly and plaintively from the room where it had been placed by its mother, the insistent, protesting cry of the baby floated into the dance-hall, and the grim faces of silent men were turned, listening, for a moment. Then they tramped out.

Some of the girls—not all, for many turned aside with tense lips and strained eyes—hastily grabbed shawls to envelop their heads, and followed.

"To think I used to like that greaser!" Louise said brokenly.

In the stillness of the room where there were only half-uttered whispers and soft footsteps among those that remained, who felt even then as if in the presence of the dying, the shrill, insistent, quick, frightened voice of the baby broke in convulsive screams.

Charles nervously flung his hands to his ears.

Louise turned to hurry to the poor little thing, so insistent in its tiny rage.

"Lou?" Charles said weakly, almost inquiringly.

"What is it, boy?"

"Nothing—now."

She started again.

"Lou—where'd they carry Doug to?"

"I don't know. The barkeep got somebody to take it away. I've got to stop that baby. Oh Lord, this is awful!"

Again she started, and again he called, fearful of letting her get out of his sight.

"What is it?" she asked impatiently.

"Lou, I've just got to talk—I can't—I can't—" and his voice went into a sob.

"Come on, boy," she said tenderly, putting an arm around him. "I know, you're all knocked out—it's an awful night—and it isn't morning yet."

They had no sooner reached the room where Mrs. Thomas, unconscious, lay moaning, than the baby, worn out, utterly exhausted, fell for a moment into unresting sleep.

"Oh God, what made it do that!" Charles exclaimed quickly as an instant later the baby opened its large, dark-blue eyes and stared for countable seconds straight at him with all the weird, majestic wisdom of infancy in its gaze.

"Oh, Lou—oh, Lou," he cried, catching hold of her, "don't let 'em hang José! He didn't do it. Lou, he didn't! Doug made me go with him. I didn't want to go. Honest to God, Lou—Doug did it!"

Louise did not say anything: she gasped in one long horrified breath as she stared bewildered, unbelieving, at her brother's distorted, fear-gripped face.

"José killed Doug—I didn't do it—he shoved the gun into my hand. He didn't know Doug did it—Thomas, I mean. I didn't want to go. I never give José back his hat and Doug knocked it off out there. Don't let 'em hang him, Lou. You won't, will you, let 'em hang him?"

"But the barkeep——"

"He won it off me—José did. I don't know how much Doug got. He said I hadn't done my share. That shows I'm innocent, Lou. Don't you see it does? I didn't do nothin' but go with him. I didn't even have a gun. José shot Doug for what he said to you and shoved the gun in my hand—said you must think I was a—was a man!"

Louise gripped his shoulders with both her hands.

"Charley—Charley!"

Her voice called his name but it was her wide-staring eyes that implored him to deny it, to say it was not true; but he only slumped into a chair and sobbed as he nodded his head to affirm all that he had confessed.

And through it all the baby slept restively, but without crying.

V

A HORSE stood at the hitching rack. The bridle reins trailed on the ground, but it was tied with a hackamore. Doug Walsh, when he tied it there, had made one of those curious slipknots which, when the end is pulled straight out, come undone with a jerk, but if the end is pulled back through the loop and jerked it tightens and is likely not to come untied without time and patience.

Fumbling in the darkness Louise tightened the knot. She tried to take off the hackamore from the horse's head, but in an idle moment Doug had spliced it so that it fitted snugly in one piece. There was no other horse at the rack. Charles had "borrowed" one when he rode with Doug, and they had all been ridden down to the grove which was a mile and a little more away.

Louise gasped and cried as she tugged at the rope. Seconds were speeding away like frantic runners in single file: any second might snatch at José's life and carry it on.

She ran back and into the dance-hall and cried hysterically for some one to give her a knife.

The girls looked helplessly one from another, then some one mentioned the knife behind the bar used to cut lemons.

As Louise dashed for it she met the bartender coming out of one of the poker rooms. He held a handful of bills in front of him.

"Whatchu know about this?" he called at her. "Found 'em on the floor in there—must 've fell out of his——"

Louise gave a glance toward the doorway: a dead man with a handkerchief thrown over his face lay on the table.

She did not stay to listen or explain, but snatched the knife and ran, leaped from the door, cut the rope with one stroke of the sharp steel, climbed into the saddle and rode as though fleeing from terror.

The night was black, but she knew the way.

As she came in sight of the grove she saw a fire, a small fire built to light up the "Rustlers' Roost," as the old limb was called where many a horse and maverick-thief had been stretched by the neck, and she could see the black shadows of men moving back and forth.

She cried out, but she might as well have tossed her voice to a gale.

Beating the sharp heels of her dancing slippers against the flanks of the horse and slapping him with ends of the reins, she dashed on. Once to bring a burst of speed she pricked him with the point of the knife, and he gave such a bound as nearly to unseat her.

And as she rode she saw one of the shadows between her and the fire slowly being raised from the ground.

It was José.

Again she cried. The distance was less than before, and her voice was one shrill shriek that rose like a banshee wail in the still night. She had been heard.

A few moments later horse and rider plunged through the circle about the fire, and as a score of hands reached for her—reached out to catch and stop her—she rose in the stirrups and with a savage upwardslash cut the rope, and the body of the gambler fell heavily to the ground.

The next instant she had thrown herself from the saddle and was pulling at the tight noose about his neck as she flung incoherent words at the stern, tense faces that were closing in, angry at this interference with their grim justice.

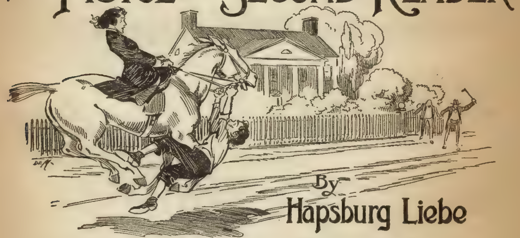
Her brother's name, Doug Walsh's name, José's name, and the name of Thomas, were jumbled confusedly in the frantic words she shouted; but slowly those who heard understood, and looked from one to another, wondering, unbelieving, awed.

Then Sheriff Clifford spoke.

"Now boys, it's as hard for me to believe this as it is for you. But maybe we've all made a mistake. Maybe we'd better talk it over an' see if there was any time tonight when this grea— I mean this fellow here was away from the dance-hall. We all know Louise wouldn't accuse that brother o' hers unless——"

Louise cried out, her voice choking with anguish and with that larger, inarticulate horror that binds the throat in the presence of one who has been greatly wronged—and is dead!

WITH PISTOL AND SECOND READER



By Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Bully of the Big Santee," "Blood of the Allisons," etc.

IT SEEMED the best thing to do. The boy burrowed feet-foremost into the haystack until the top of his tousled head was even with the outside.

Night had fallen an hour before, and he had walked all of eighteen rough miles barefoot that day, but he was too genuinely, painfully hungry to go to sleep easily. So he lay there in the haystack, defiant rather than lonesome or sorry for himself, and watched the steady white electric street-lamps of the town in the valley just below.

They were queer lights to him. He had

seen nothing like them in the big blue mountains that he was leaving behind him forever. But there would be many, many strange things in the new world that lay ready for his conquering; he resolved that he would not be surprised at anything he saw.

The second reader and the pistol hurt his side. He took them out of his dirty, striped cotton shirt, and pushed them carefully into the hay just above his head. Very carefully, for the pistol was all that he had left to remind him of his father, "Ironhead Bill" Faley; and the worn, old second reader had been given to him as a storybook by the meek and long-suffering little mother before the cataclysm—it was his Good Book, verily, his Shannon's Code of Life, his history and encyclopedia of the universe.

Then he went to sleep and dreamed of the tailor and the king.

At the bright dawn he awoke with his mind filled with thoughts of kings and queens. Would there be a royal family in the little lowland city down there? He asked himself the question in all seriousness. You see, he was only twelve years old, and he knew the world only through hearsay and that beloved second reader; he believed every blessed word that was in the book, and less than half of that which he had heard.

Then he took the old pistol from the hay, looked for the twentieth time since he had left Laurel Gap to see that it was loaded, and slipped it inside his shirt. If there was a king, he was ready and anxious to fight that monarch's enemies.

Fight? David Faley? His middle name should have been fight. The men of his people had fought themselves to death. Literally, fought themselves to death. Ironhead Bill had been the chief of the clan. When Bill Faley and his little son were the only Faleys left in the Laurel Gap country, they had fled to North Carolina. Ironhead Bill was heartbroken and sick over his wife's untimely passing, and no longer able to give battle to the Wansleys, who were legion. And in the North Carolina hills he had died.

But never for a minute were those hills home to the boy David. He had made his way back to Laurel Gap to find that there he was an outcast, a pariah, simply because he was a Faley. One old woman had thrown him a moldy pone of cornbread, as one throws a bone to a dog, and that was the single expression of kindliness he had had shown him upon his return to Laurel Gap.

David had hurled the moldy bread into the hag's face, and stood her four grown sons off with the revolver he carried; then he had promised an early funeral to the man who followed him, and put out for that place of mystery that they called Johnsville. In the afternoon of that day a farmer's wife had given him something to eat for splitting an armful of stovewood.

"The' must be a king," he told himself as he crept out of the haystack. "The' must be a king and a queen. And ef the' is, I'll shore see 'em afore I lay me down to sleep ag'in."

David Faley brushed off the wisps of hay that clung to his ragged clothing, arranged the pistol so that the waistband of his trousers would hold it and the blousing of his shirt would hide it, and put the second reader in with it. Then he went down the grassy slope and into the valley. He drank from a spring brook, made a sort of breakfast on apples and berries, and walked toward town.

There was no sign of a castle, but he saw many houses; houses of brick, and stone, and wood, but no houses built of whole logs. David went slowly down the main business street. The signs he saw over doors and on windows were of fascinating interest to him; he spelled them all out, and he was very proud of his ability to read—none of the —— Wansleys, he remembered, could read. There were more lawyers than anything else, it seemed, and he didn't know what a lawyer was!

He asked a passer-by.

"A lawyer?" frowned the man, a cynic, without doubt. "A lawyer, son, is a liar."

The man walked on. David stood looking soberly at his back.

"A lawyer is a liar," muttered the lad to himself. "No Faley couldn't be a lawyer then. A Faley never told a lie."

It had been their redeeming feature; it had been their religion—"A Faley never told a lie."

Suddenly David halted before a tailor's sign, and his brown eyes brightened. The door was opened invitingly, and he walked in. A middle-aged man with a hook-nose leaned over a showcase, looked over a pair of brass-rimmed spectacles.

"What is it, son?"

"Whar does the king live?" David asked.

"The king! Which King? Jim King, or George King, or Hennery? Look here, you little ragamuffin, you ain't tryin' to saw me, are you? If you are, by Jupiter, I'll smack your jaws for you!"

The tailor walked around the showcase. David stared, and he was a little white. Perhaps the tailor had dyspepsia; anyway, he was sour enough for vinegar. He caught the Faley by the ear, and the next moment he was looking into the one black eye of a pistol-barrel!

"Turn it loose!" snapped David; and the other obeyed with an alacrity that was ludicrous.

"Police!" yelled the frightened, hook-nosed man.

Police? What was that? David wondered.

And in another moment he knew. A long arm in a blue sleeve shot over his shoulder; the pistol was seized and wrenched from his grip; a heavy hand caught him by the collar of his dirty cotton shirt and dragged him roughly to the sidewalk. David twisted half-around, looked upward, and saw a face that was leering and brutish.

The Faley struck that face with his brown little fist, struck it as hard as he could strike, and he had the sweet satisfaction of seeing a crimson fluid that was not red ink start from the policeman's nose. Quickly the officer pocketed Ironhead Bill Faley's revolver and caught the boy's wrists in both hands, and it hurt. David went paler, but not a sound escaped his lips. Nor did a tear come to his eyes; it had long been his boast that nobody had ever been able to make him cry.

"You'll come wi' me," growled the policeman; and he jerked the boy clear of the sidewalk.

Then a strong, lean hand dropped on the officer's shoulder from behind, and he halted as suddenly as though he had been shot.

David heard a voice saying sharply:

"If you feel that you've got to manhandle somebody, Sayler, try manhandling me. You must treat the kid white, Sayler; understand?"

THE boy looked upward and around. He saw a tall and lean, keen-eyed, smooth-faced man of about twenty-seven; a man who wore a broad-brimmed black hat, a perfectly white shirt and collar, a black string-tie, a black suit of clothes, and a pair of expensive Spanish boots. He had been riding.

"I'll have to take him before Judge Bliss, Lew," Sayler said quite meekly. "He had a gun, and he tried to shoot Tom Larkin."

Lew Tannehill, real eastern Tennessee aristocrat, looked down at the lad with an amused, half-whimsical smile. David Faley returned his gaze without a sign of flinching.

"Yes," Tannehill agreed, "you'll have to do that."

A crowd had gathered, of course, and this crowd followed Johnsville's chief of police and only policeman and his youthful prisoner to the magistrate's office. Tannehill was among them. In fact, he led them.

Old Walter Bliss had been a circuit-court judge for more years than he had toes, and they still called him "Judge" Bliss. Now he was an attorney, a real-estate dealer, and a magistrate; he was big and bald, and very near-sighted. As the crowd began to file into his office, he adjusted his glasses and wheeled in his desk chair.

"Well, Sayler, what's this?"

Sayler halted the boy at the railing that stood between him and Johnsville's magistrate, surrendered the pistol that had been the pride of Bill Faley's heart, and told all he knew of the "attempted assault." Tom Larkin bore out the policeman's statement. A sort of trial was held, and David was asked many questions concerning himself. Through it all Lew Tannehill took the juvenile prisoner's part; he pleaded the boy's case with a moving eloquence that seemed as natural with him as to breathe.

Judge Bliss listened attentively to this. It was easy to see that he had no love whatever for Tannehill, but he was courteous, if cold. The bare truth of the matter was that he hated Tannehill and was too well-bred to show it. Walter Bliss, too, was a real Tennessee aristocrat.

The magistrate was in a quandary. He was unaccustomed to being called upon to decide cases such as this. He glanced toward Tannehill as though he would ask advice; then he caught himself, changed his glance to an icy stare and shifted it quickly.

"I'll vouch for the boy," said Tannehill. "I need a boy in my office, and I'll give him the place. As for the legal side of it, sir, I think this is a thing that might be left entirely to the discretion of the court; though you understand, sir, I'm not trying to advise you."

"Very well, Lewis," Bliss replied bluntly. "Very well, you take charge of him. And I'll expect you to see that he behaves himself."

Tannehill took the boy's arm and smiled down at him.

"Let's go, son. It's all right."

"I'll not go without my gun," protested David, "it was my daddy's!"

"But it will be safe here," Tannehill assured him. "It's too heavy to lug around, and it's unlawful. So let's just leave it with the judge; he'll take good care of it."

"Certainly, sir; certainly!" said Judge Bliss.

The Faley permitted himself to be led out to the street, down the street half the length of a city block, up-stairs and into an office room over the drug-store. There he halted and looked around him. He saw books by the hundred, a table littered with newspapers, chairs, a rolltop desk, pictures on the wall. On the door, which stood open, he spelled out words that told him that his big friend was a lawyer.

Then he turned his serious brown eyes upon the eyes of Tannehill, he was disappointed, hurt.

"So you're a liar," he muttered, "and I shore did like you."

"Most all men are liars," laughed Tannehill, "at one time or another."

"The Faleys wasn't," said David. "I ain't."

"We'll pass it. Why did you ask Larkin where the king lived? Where did you get that king idea?"

Out came the old second reader. David had not mentioned it during his trial; if they took his "gun," mightn't they also take his story-book? The two sat down, and David read to Tannehill the story of the tailor and the king.

"That's whar I got it," he said triumphantly, when he had finished.

At first, Tannehill was inclined to laugh. Then he began to look thoughtful, and a full understanding came. Poor little boy! He hated to break that pretty dream; far too many of the dreams of the world's dreamers had been broken, already. He thought of the time, never to be forgotten, when he had learned the truth about Santa Claus. Suddenly he bent forward and took one of David Faley's dirty little hands, and pressed it.

"Son," he said, "by coming to Johnsville you've won something and lost something. What you've won, the future only can show you. What you've lost—I swear, I'd rather take a horsewhipping than to tell you, lad, but there are no kings and queens, no knights and ladies, no princes and princesses, like those in that book. Those are—well, they are just story-people; don't you see?"

A long talk followed, and it hurt them both. David saw, and he believed, at last. It was noontime when it was over. The boy, half-sick with disillusionment, went with his friend toward the great old brick home of the Tannehills for dinner.

It was on this little journey that David first saw the girl. She was about twenty-four, tall and exceedingly pretty; she had blue eyes, and hair that was only a trifle darker than the color of old-gold. When she saw Tannehill, she blushed, and Tannehill whispered as he passed her:

"Four o'clock. Daisies."

"Who's that?" asked David, a moment later.

The answer came readily.

"Judge Bliss' daughter, Miss Cordelia."

"She's purtier'n a speckled pup," said David. "Do you like her, Mr. Lew?"

Mr. Lew looked down at him, and Mr. Lew's countenance was serious.

"You bet," he said, "you bet, I like her."

A tall and bearded old man, an old woman in a lacy black dress, and a very good-looking young woman in white ate dinner with them. The three were young Tannehill's father, mother, and sister, and they were exceptionally kind to David; they were eager to help Lew in making out a list of the new clothing the little mountaineer would need.

When the meal was over, David turned to old Tannehill with this:

"You look like my grampaw. You've got a white beard like him. My grampaw was a fine man. He died with a rifle in his hands, and the barrel was red-hot; he died on his feet, a cussin' the Wansleys. Mr. Lew he said I was a goin' to live here for the present, ef I'd be a good boy. I'm a goin' to be a good boy, shore. Can I call you 'Grampaw?' "

George Tannehill seemed at a loss to know just what to say. Finally he answered—

"You may call me 'Grandpa' whenever you like, David."

There were many times afterward when he thought of the incident, and always he was glad that he had granted the first wish that the boy expressed. For the two were thicker than beans in a bag long before a frost fell.

THE Summer ran on, and Johnsville came to know the Faley as "the Tannehill boy," and the latter half of August came. Then it was that David learned the secret. Two secrets, to be exact.

On a warm Sunday afternoon, when old Mr. Tannehill was asleep, and old Mrs. Tannehill was visiting the minister's wife, and Miss Anna had company in the parlor, and he couldn't locate Mr. Lew—David strolled down to the creek and followed it out of town. Suddenly he rounded a short bend in the brush-lined stream, and found himself facing a pretty little dell filled with daisies; and in that dell stood Lew Tannehill and Judge Bliss' daughter—and they looked as tragic as a pair of professional Shakespearean actors in the last act. Tannehill stood with the girl's hands in his, and the girl's eyes were turned downward, and both of them were bareheaded.

Since Tannehill's back was turned upon David, and the girl was looking toward her feet, neither knew of the boy's presence near by. Miss Cordelia began to speak in a low voice:

"It's useless, Lew," she said sadly. "And it's so very painful. For four years it's been like this. There is utterly no hope that we'll ever be able to marry. Lew, we mustn't love ourselves more than we love our—our fathers and mothers. I'm convinced that we'd better—quit. I'll promise you that I'll never marry anybody."

David saw Lew bend forward and kiss Miss Cordelia on the forehead.

"Not that, Delia," said he. "Not an eternal good-by!"

"But father and mother are getting old," the young woman went on, "and some day they're going to find out that I've been slyly meeting you for four years, and then—Lew, Lew, I don't think I could bear it! And they are so very kind to me. They're always giving me pretty things and costly things. Only yesterday father gave me a milk-white saddler that came from Kentucky—oh, such a beautiful horse!"

Let me say here parenthetically that this fine saddle-horse had been known by its Blue Grass keeper as "The White Satan," and that its latest buyer was entirely unacquainted with its record; that Judge Walter Bliss knew of his daughter's secret meetings with Lew Tannehill, and that he was trying to win his daughter back by means of overpowering kindliness in massed formation. Hence the pretty things, and the costly things; and the success he was having was proof that old Walter Bliss was no stranger to the ways of human nature.

"I saw it," said Tannehill. "And it really is a superb animal. But there's some fire in its eyes yet, and it ought to be better broken before you ride it. As to our 'quitting'—perhaps you are right, Delia. I'll leave it to you. But I hate the thought of it! It makes the whole world look blue."

All at once David Faley realized that he was doing a most ungentlemanly thing in eavesdropping like that. He stole back down the creek a hundred yards, took off his shoes and stockings, and plunged into the shallow water to wade.

Half an hour, and Lew Tannehill came down the creek. He carried his hat in his hand, and he seemed very gloomy. At a point opposite David, he halted, and the lad waded out.

"Mr. Lew," began the boy, "I heerd part o' what you and Miss Cordelie said back thar. I couldn't hardly help it. And ever sence I heerd it, I've been busy wonderin'—why cain't you and her marry?"

He had not lost much of his musical hill-drawl. Tannehill smiled a little, and that little whimsically, and kicked a stone into the creek as though it had offended him.

"Don't you know, son?" he said after a silent minute. "But I guess you don't. It isn't talked of much. Her father and my father dislike each other a great deal; it's been like that for years and years. I can easily remember the time when they fought like wildcats on bare sight of each other. It's queer, too, for they spent their childhood, boyhood, and the early part of their manhood as the most inseparable of friends. They went fishing, hunting, swimming, did everything, together; where one was, there was the other. Then came the quarrel, and nobody seems to remember what it was about."

He couldn't understand, when he had finished, why he had told the lad. Perhaps it was his desperation that had done it. For just that afternoon he and Cordelia Bliss had said what they believed was good-by for all time.

"Why don't they git up a feud," frowned David, "and use guns and pistols, and have it out? That's the way the Wansleys and Faleys—I mean the Faleys and Wansleys —done when they got mad."

"And you see how it ended, don't you?"

David's gaze fell.

"You're right. Yes, I see. Makin' friends o' yore pap and her'n would take off all o' the trouble, wouldn't it? Ain't the' no way to make 'em friends?"

"No way on earth," and Tannehill shook his head. "You'd as well try to stop the sun."

As they went toward home, the little mountaineer was thoughtful. He was trying to think of some plan by which he himself could unite the two old belligerents. It was going to be a big job, he told himself. If Mr. Lew had found it as impossible as to stop the sun, what could he do?

But he didn't give up. He owed Lew Tannehill too much to give up.

Now if the boy Faley was anything, he was cunning and resourceful. He had had to be that in order to survive in the maelstrom of adverse forces that had been in his environment from the day, almost, of his birth; and he had inherited cunning and resourcefulness from a long line of fighting ancestors. He was not a very great while in thinking of a scheme that offered some promise.

But—could he bring himself to do the thing?

The difficulty with it was that he would have to go back on the religion of his people, go back on it squarely. David thought over the matter day after day, lay in his bed and thought over it night after night. It eventually boiled itself down to this, in the bottom of the crucible:

"Do I love my own lowdown self more'n I love Mr. Lew and Miss Cordelie?"

Then, quickly, in the old, stern language of his fathers—

"Ef I go to hell for it, I'll try it!"

ON THE next Sunday afternoon, Walter Bliss took a thick book from his library, went to a corner of his broad and shady veranda, and ensconced his huge figure comfortably in a wide wicker rocker. He had no more than opened the book and adjusted his glasses, when there was the sound of light footfalls on the floor at his right, and he turned his white head to see the Tannehill boy.

"I jest thought I'd come over to see ye," grinned David. "I allus did like you, Mr.—Judge Bliss. I ain't never forgot you. I reckon you've kept my daddy's pistol good?"

Old Bliss laughed, closed the book on his knees, and put his feet on the veranda railing.

"There's a chair; sit down," he nodded. "Yes, I've taken good care of the revolver. I'm glad you came, son, of course; but it's a nine-days wonder the Tannehills would let you."

David's heart beat faster as he accepted the chair. Now was his golden chance!

"They said it was all right with them," replied David. "Old Mr. Tannehill he told me you was the best man in this end o' the State. He said he'd give a laig clean to the hip-j'int ef he could be a boy with you ag'in, and go a fishin' and a swimmin' and a huntin' with you oncet more. He said—he told Grammaw Tannehill—ef he died afore he got to shake hands with you and be friends, he'd die mighty bad onsatisfied. And last night when he held fambly prayers he shore axed the Lord to remember you and every single one o' yore folks."

Thus did a Faley, and the last of the Faleys, lie!

Judge Bliss took his feet off the veranda railing and sat up straight in the wicker rocker. His eyes flashed into the eyes of the boy, and the boy did not look away.

"Which—which Mr. Tannehill?" he floundered. "George Tannehill? But—yes, yes. Son, he didn't say that; did he?"

"He shore did," bravely. "Cross my heart, and hope to die ef he didn't."

The youthful diplomat and liar and hero thought it best to change the subject, and he did. They talked on about a number of things; but the father of Miss Cordelia seemed to want to think, rather than to talk, and David left him to himself.

David found Tannehill the elder sitting alone in his study, poring over an ancient law book. He stole up behind the gray old man, slipped his hands around and pushed the obstructing spectacles gently upward, and covered the dim eyes with the tips of his fingers.

"Guess!" he said mischievously, lovingly, delightedly.

George Tannehill winked at himself, so to speak.

"Lew!" he said.

"Guess ag'in!"

"Fanny!"

"Ag'in!" snickered the lad.

"Mother!"

"Haw! Haw! Ag'in!"

"Oh, then it must be David."

"That time you got 'er," laughed David.

He sat himself down on old Tannehill's knee; they were first-rate pals now.

"You guessed who I was, grampaw," he went on; "see ef ye can guess whar' I've been to."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Blisses, grampaw."

"What! Bliss'!" Tannehill was displeased.

"Did you keer?"

With half the air of having disowned him, George Tannehill deliberately placed the boy on a near-by chair. Then he bent toward David, and his bearded face was serious, and his eyes were narrowed. David took a fresh hold on himself; this was going to be the middle of the bridge for him

"Did any of the Blisses say anything about me?" Tannehill demanded.

Ironhead Bill Faley's son seemed to be trying to remember.

"Le's see, grampaw. What was it he did say about you? Oh, yes—I got it now. Judge Bliss he told me you and him were boys together. He said him and you used to go a swimmin' and a fishin' and a huntin' together. He said he'd give a million dollars for jest one o' them old happy days with you. And he said ef he died afore he got to shake hands with you and be friends, he'd die mighty bad onsatisfied. Then he took out his hankercheef and cried awful pitiful."

George Tannehill was not what one could call gullible. For a long minute he bored his gaze into the countenance of the boy, trying to search out some sign of falsehood. But David faced him steadfastly.

"Son," finally asked Tannehill, "honestly, did Walter Bliss say that?"

"The's one thing a Faley never done, grampaw," quietly, convincingly, "and that's tell a lie."

It was his last card, and the playing of it wrung his heart.

"My little David," suddenly said the old man, very gently, "I beg your pardon most humbly."

He rose, and the other watched him. He went to his bedroom, put on a fresh shirt and collar and tie, and combed his hair very carefully; then he found his hat and cane, and set out for the home of the Blisses! David, filled with misgiving, followed some fifty feet behind him, to hear and to see.

It wasn't far to the home of the Blisses, and Tannehill's cane soon stepped off the little distance. The old ex-judge was standing at the gate; he was looking for his daughter, who had gone horseback-riding more than two hours before. Tannehill walked up and put out his hand, and Bliss gripped it unhesitatingly; they shook with a great heartiness, and their chins quivered. David crept a few yards closer and listened—and that which he heard was like a bullet to him:

"The boy was telling me," began Tannehill, "that you said—that you'd like to be friends again with me. I—I'm sure I——"

"I never said any such thing!" exploded Walter Bliss, stiffening. "The boy told me——"

The boy wheeled and ran. The greatest sacrifice he had been able to make for his Mr. Lew, a sacrifice greater than to die, had been for nothing! Less than nothing; the Tannehills would turn him out, and he would be a ragamuffin and an outcast again, with not a soul to love him. He had never been so badly hurt, so nearly crushed, before. But he didn't cry about it. Nobody had ever been able to make him cry. He had that, at least, left to him.

When he had gone fifty yards, he halted and looked back. The two old men were talking in angry tones, and standing as straight as a pair of pine trees. He had made matters even worse—they were going to fight!

WHEN the rapid, ringing sounds of hoofbeats came to his ears, and he faced the other way. He saw that beautiful white horse of Miss Cordelia's coming wildly up the street, with its head in the air and foam flying from its nostrils—

and Miss Cordelia was on its back and clinging desperately to the old-fashioned side-saddle; she was as pale as death, too badly frightened to even cry out!

The Faley didn't stop to think. There wasn't time, anyway. He had a hazy wish that he might die and save the girl, as he dashed for the middle of the street. As the horse was about to pass him, he made a leap for its head and caught the reins at the bit in both hands and held on grimly.

A leg splintered under an ironshod hoof; a loose nail in another hoof gashed his other leg; again and again he was lifted into the air and dashed to the stones by that mad white Satan of a horse—still he held on, held on. And the horse tired of that dead weight that it couldn't shake off, slowed down, groaned despairingly and stopped squarely in front of Judge Bliss and old George Tannehill.

Miss Cordelia got to the ground somehow, and ran to the boy. The two old men, themselves and their differences forgotten, reached the Faley at the same time. Though he seemed to know nothing, the lad's hands were set so tightly on the leathern straps that they had to be pried open one finger after another, while the horse's eyes blazed with threats of more devilment. A dozen neighbors, among them a doctor, and Johnsville's policeman ran up. The doctor gathered the limp little body, which was now wholly insensible, into his arms.

"Take him into my house," Judge Bliss ordered crisply.

Before he followed, Walter Bliss calmly borrowed a revolver from Policeman Sayler, and shot the white Satan squarely through the brain.

"So vicious a horse," he said, "deserves it."

"Amen," solemnly growled old George Tannehill.

When David Faley came to, it was late at night. He was in a bed that was like his own, and yet was not his own. The electric droplight was shaded with half a newspaper. He tried to move his legs; one of them hurt, and the other was numb and like wood. Doctor Rankin stepped out of the gloom, and Tannehills and Blisses followed him.

"Grampaw!" cried the Faley; and the man he had addressed bowed his head and went back, stumbling as he went.

"Lie still, son," said the doctor, with a smile that wasn't altogether professional. "You'll soon be all right."

David went to sleep. At sundown of the following day, he awoke to find his mind clear of the effects of ether. Standing over him were Miss Cordelia and Lew Tannehill, and by their faces he knew that they were not unhappy.

"You did a good job of it, after all, David," said Lew. "You see, we figured it all out. The old gentlemen are the tightest friends in the State, and Delia and I are going to be married next month. And we're going to adopt you on the same day."

David smiled.

"Well, I'm glad, glad for you folks and glad for myself," he drawled in the old drawl of the hills. "And I'm g-glad I li-li-lied like I d-d-done——"

Sniff-sniff! at last, at last.

After a moment, calmly:

"Mr. Lew, the fust chanst ye have, I wisht ye'd bring me my second reader, which ye'll find on the table in my room. You said the' wasn't no people like them in that book no more, but—but for me the's allus got to be one king, anyways, and one queen."

At which a young woman with blue eyes and hair a little darker than the color of old-gold stooped to kiss him.

BEFORE MARQUETTE

A THREE-PART STORY
PART II.

By Kathrene & Robert Pinkerton

Authors of "On Guard," "The White Indians," etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form

"WHAT?" roared Sir William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia. "Five hundred pounds less than last year!"

"Five hundred and sixty-two pounds, six shillings, your Excellency," replied his secretary.

"There were more traders?" asked the governor.

"Two more, your Excellency."

"We've killed off none of the savages. Has less fur been taken or have we not received it?"

"There is no reason, your Excellency, to believe that the savages have taken less. They are eager enough for the goods."

"Have the warden of the gaol conduct that disgraceful son of Captain Jeffreys before me at once," commanded the governor.

"Your life is at stake," began Sir William, addressing Richard Jeffreys.

"You have been in gaol under charges of failure to attend church, blasphemy, failure to plant corn, illicit trade with the Indians, smuggling furs and seditious utterances. There is proof enough to hang you three times over. But there is a reason I have for bringing you here. They tell me you have been to the Blue Mountains?"

"Yes, and beyond," answered Dick.

"Then there is hope for you," said Sir William. "The king needs you. Our fur business must be controlled as the king would have it. Unlicensed traders are visiting the Indians. The Dutch are smuggling. A man must go among the Indians, win them, must catch these outlaw traders and bring information that will permit us to apprehend them. Take an oath of allegiance to the king, mend your ways and Captain Jeffreys' son may live to be a credit to him and to his king. You may have three hours in which to decide."

The door was opened and Richard Jeffreys was led back to the gaol.

Once more Dick stood before the governor.

"Well?" demanded Sir William.

"I tell you, Governor Berkeley, you and your kind have come to the wrong land. I know that God set aside this land for men, not kings, for the rule of right and justice. And before a hundred years have passed men will rule this land."

The governor's face turned purple with rage.

"Does the noose have to tighten about your neck before you come to your senses and acknowledge the king and abandon your wild ideas, your seditious utterances?" asked Sir William.

A moment later and Dick's hands reached out. One grasped his excellency's throat, the other closed his mouth and bent back his head.

"Not a move, or your breast will sheathe your dagger," whispered Jeffreys.

Binding the governor's hands and mouth, Dick sprang out the window. After two hours of paddling he drew in to shore at a clump of sycamores.

"Dick! How did you get away?" asked Elizabeth Carver.

Dick explained the result of his interview with Sir William Berkeley.

Suddenly the girl grasped his arm. They listened. The sound of pounding hoofs on the road was heard.

"Your pursuers have cut you off!" she cried. "There is a way to escape. Back of the tobacco-sheds is a cabin. Go there. I'll see that you get food and water."

Dick Jeffreys was in the region of the Great Lakes. Months had passed since he left Virginia. Standing by a river he saw an approaching canoe. In the craft were Basile Pombert, Leon la Gard and Michel Charon, French *coureurs de bois*. They stopped at the bank at Dick's feet. He stepped into the canoe.

Rowing down the river they reached the village of the Islinois Indians, with whom the *coureurs de bois* desired to trade.

The canoes were unloaded and the exchange of knives, muskets, trinkets and brandy for buffalo and beaver-skins was begun.

CHAPTER VI

THE MACHINATIONS OF BASILE

WITH night came to the peaceful village of the Islinois scenes undreamed of even in the fiercest passions of savage warfare. A huge fire blazed high in the space between the row of brush and grass cabins and the river bank where the Frenchmen had landed, and around this, shrieking, reeling, their naked bodies glistening with perspiration in the firelight, circled the warriors of the band.

Basile, cool, calculating, with an eye for everything and every one, poured brandy into the greedily extended gourds, but never until Leon or Michel had first received a bundle of furs, and always with an impartiality that would result in no warrior escaping the enflaming consequences of the debauch. Basile wanted no laggards, no half-sober savages, and so unerringly did he estimate the effects of the liquor on each one, so skilfully did he apportion the brandy, each man and youth in the village moved forward to the successive stages of drunkenness as uniformly as troops maneuver on a parade-ground.

The savages danced and yelled about the fire. They still contained control of their bodies, though their brains were scorched. Constantly men broke away, rushed into the darkness and returned with fresh bundles of furs, which they tossed at Basile's feet before extending their gourds. The brandy was downed at a gulp and, freshly inflamed, they whirled away into the shrieking circle.

Except in isolated instances of insolent attempts to compel larger portions, the white men were not molested. Basile had cleverly implanted the idea in their minds at the beginning that fur would always bring brandy, and nothing else, and automatically, as the effects wore off, as more stimulant was desired, the savages rushed away for new bundles of pelts.

Dick Jeffreys, though in full view of the orgy, had little time to note the details of the trading. As fast as the fur was received, the brandy doled out, Leon and Michel tossed the skins back to him to be tied into bundles and piled on the river bank close to the canoes.

It was not the demoralization of the warriors, or even the possible danger to the four white men should the savages get beyond control, that occupied Dick's mind as he worked rapidly over his bales. Brandy, he knew, had always been an accessory to the fur trade. The savages had come to expect it, and perhaps after all there was no harm done in thus transporting them into a new world, in furnishing high lights they could not otherwise hope for. Surely nothing had happened so far that could be objected to, even the huge price paid for the liquor. There was no other brandy within a hundred leagues or more, and everywhere supply and demand govern price.

But it was in the attitude of Michel when they had transported the weapons across the river, in the cold, scheming actions of Basile, in a dread of something far worse for which he could find no tangible grounds, that Dick had his misgivings. As he pondered over this, his eyes spared from his work as much as possible, a change came. As he turned toward the river, laden with fur, Basile looked at the shrieking circle of warriors and then glanced at Michel and Leon.

"Now," Michel whispered. "Here is the chief himself."

The leader of the savages, his legs becoming uncertain in their movements, thrust himself forward and tossed a bundle of beaver skins at the feet of the white men. At the same time his gourd waved uncertainly toward the cask.

"You are not generous," Basile told him with a smile. "Have not your women scraped these skins? Have they not planted the maize? Have they not cared for the meat when you have killed it? Why then should they not share in your rejoicing?"

The chief's eyes narrowed as he digested this idea, and they glinted selfishly.

"Just a drink, half a gourd, for your wives," continued Basile. "They have earned it. Come! Be generous as befits a great chief."

Several other Indians had come up to calmor for more drink, and they had heard. One seemed to find amusement in the idea and yelled his approval. But before he could hand his gourd forward the chief, not to be outdone, demanded a full dipper for the women of his family. As Basile filled it, more generously than ever before, the chief turned and called the names of his women.

Every woman and child in the village had been present at the carousal, sitting in a circle outside the dancers, adding to the tumult, the women even begging sometimes for a little of the elixir which seemed so to exalt the men. As the chief called out, three women arose, one tumbling a child from her lap, and ran forward. The chief passed the gourd to them and, amid much giggling, coughing, sputtering and gibes from the others, the liquor was downed.

The warriors immediately clamored for brandy for their women and in a moment Basile was doling out the fiery stuff faster than before. Half an hour later every woman in the circle was as intoxicated as the men and, joining in the dance, they outstripped the braves with their shrill screams and contortions.

With the advent of the women the character of the orgy began to change swiftly. The crowd of dancers about the fire was more dense. One brave stepped on another's feet and was knocked down. He arose, pulled a burning stick from the fire and struck his adversary across the face, blinding him and sending him reeling through the blaze.

The encounter pleased the crowd and at the same time aroused a desire for conflict. Several fights started. Two men wrestled impotently for a time, a yelping circle of demons about them. Then one, with a snap like that of a fear-maddened beast, bit off the other's nose.

A woman, shrieking hysterically, pulled a burning stick from the fire and held it across the bare back of a dancing warrior. He cried in agony and then whirled and thrust the woman into the fire, where she stumbled and fell and then rushed out from the other side, her hair a blazing torch.

On every side personal encounters started. Without weapons, unable to strike or wrestle effectively, the savages resorted to snapping and tearing with their teeth. Noses and ears were bitten off, chunks of flesh were ripped from backs and breasts and shoulders. Blood flowed down the bare bodies of the men and soaked the scanty skin garments of the women.

One woman suddenly ran from the circle, snatched up a sleeping infant from the arms of an older child and, with a fiendish shriek, hurled it into the center of the flames. The little body writhed for a few moments, its skin scorched and crinkled. Then it lay quite still.

Dick, stupefied by the horror of the scene, did not realize for a time that no more furs were forthcoming, though the gourds were kept full. Basile was assisted in the dispensation by both Leon and Michel. All three worked swiftly, their faces alight in anticipation, seemingly oblivious of the horror about them.

At last Basile rolled out a cask, knocked in the head and waved the savages toward it. There was a scramble immediately, the clattering of gourds drowned out by yells and screams. Fights were started everywhere, blood flowed to the accompaniment of shrieks of anguish. Men and women reeled and weaved about aimlessly. Some swayed and fell, to lie motionless, completely overcome, or to struggle vainly to rise. One warrior stumbled and plunged down the bank, falling with his head and shoulders in the water. His feet kicked for a time, but his body only slid farther in the mud and at last it disappeared without leaving a ripple on the water.

"Come, Dick!" cried Leon. "The time has arrived. Be quick!"

He dashed off after Michel and Basile but the Virginian, sickened by the events of the evening, comparing the bestial creatures before his eyes with the happy, contented, smiling, friendly people he had seen only a few hours before, remained where he stood, too stunned even to comprehend the reality of this complete and wanton degradation.

AS HE watched, the very horror of the scene began to compel a realization of the crime in which he had had a part. His paralysis became that of enervating disgust and repulsion, of self-accusation and remorse.

"Come, you English fool!" cried Basile from behind him. "Get into the cabins at once. We must be away soon."

Dick whirled to see the Frenchman's evil face scowling at him from above a heap of trade-goods with which his arms were laden. Basile dumped his burden down on the bank beside the furs and again faced Dick.

"You beast!" cried the Virginian, stung at last to action by the realization that his companions were about to terminate their visit by stealing all they had traded, by robbing these unsuspecting, friendly children not only of their innocence but even of the very price of it.

He leaped forward and struck Basile in the face with all his strength. The Frenchman reeled against a savage and then, cursing hysterically, sprang back to meet the attack. Dick stepped to one side and again his fist found Basile's face. At the same instant a stick of wood thrown by a drunken warrior sent the Virginian reeling down the bank beside the Frenchman.

Basile met him, not with a blow, but with a steadying arm.

"Watch!" he commanded. "The savages have turned upon us. Leon! Michel!"

Dick whirled at Basile's side to see a group of shrieking warriors charging down upon them, led by the one against whom Basile had fallen and who had struck Dick in retaliation.

"Your fists," advised Basile. "Strike quick and hard and don't let them get their arms about you."

Side by side he and Dick met the charge of the reeling, crazed savages. Two went down, then a third. But others took their places and the white men, to evade the clutching arms and gleaming teeth, would have been forced back into the river had not Michel and Leon charged into them with swinging muskets.

No more than a dozen Indians had taken part in the attack. The others, apparently uninterested, still circled about the fire.

"I'll attend to you later, English dog!" Basile whispered in Dick's ear as he turned away to follow Leon and Michel to the cabins and fresh plundering.

The Frenchmen left Dick standing above the bodies of the savages they had knocked senseless. Instinctively he started after the *coureurs de bois* and then his utter helplessness in the face of all that had happened broght him up with a start.

The Indians were mad with liquor, past control, past help of any kind. Once they had recovered, once they learned all that had been done to them, their desire for vengeance would be boundless. Now the damage had been done. Dick could only hope to escape with the Frenchmen and settle with Basile afterward.

To rid himself at least of the sight of this rape of an innocent people the Virginian started down the bank of the river, seeking the darkness beyond the circle of the fire. He stumbled blindly on among some bushes, stopping only when he heard a low cry and sounds of a struggle in front of him. At the same instant a warrior applied a torch to the grass roof of a cabin and the whole village was lighted instantly.

The first rays disclosed to Dick a young girl struggling in the arms of Basile. The Frenchman's face was red from her scratches, but he only laughed and held her more tightly.

Instantly Dick was upon him, striking, tearing at his arms, beating his face and head and shoulders. Basile dropped the girl with a curse and reached for his knife. As it slipped from his belt Dick swung with all his strength and his fist met the Frenchman's jaw. He dropped silently into the grass.

Dick turned to find the girl watching him in wonder.

"When you played with my little brother today," she began suddenly, "I knew you were not like the others. Now you have saved me. So I shall tell you something to save you. My father once journeyed far to the north, to a great lake your people call Superior. He saw Frenchmen there, like yourselves, and he saw them give brandy to our people. Today he would not taste of it, nor would he let me, and when you began to give brandy to us he went down the river to tell the warriors of the next village. They come soon, and then there will be stakes, and pine splinters, for all of you."

The seriousness of her manner had commanded Dick's attention and, although he had been unable to comprehend all of her speech, he had grasped enough of it to have a clear idea of her meaning.

"You say," he asked, "that your father will lead the warriors against us?"

For answer she held up her hand.

"Listen," she said simply.

A single war-whoop sounded from down the river, a cry stabbing through the darkness and the dying clamor about the fire. Instantly Dick stooped and lifted Basile's limp body. With a struggle he swung it to his shoulder and set off along the bank toward the canoes.

"Leon! Michel!" he cried as he staggered beneath his burden. "Quick, or we are lost!"

As he came to the dance-fire the two Frenchmen, their arms full of loot, rushed down to the canoes.

"Quick!" Dick commanded. "To your paddles. The warriors of the next village are here."

"What of it?" demanded Leon. "We'll get them drunk, too."

"But they have been warned by one from this village, one who would not drink, and they have been told that we robbed and killed after making them mad. It's the stake for all of us."

"Nonsense!" Michel retorted. "There is——"

His words were drowned by a yell from the edge of the village that froze all three for an instant. Then as one man they turned to the canoe into which Dick had dumped Basile, threw in their muskets and leaped after them. Dick in the bow, Michel in the stern, Leon kneeling astride his unconscious companion, they paddled as they had never paddled before.

But before they had pulled away from the light of the burning cabin Dick looked over his shoulder to see a stream of naked warriors flow through the circle about the fire. There was a yell, shrill, high above the bedlam of the camp, echoing like the staccato cry of the wolf that snaps at the haunches of a deer. A glistening arm pointed toward the shadow of the fleeing canoe and the next instant arrows rained on the water about it.

CHAPTER VII

HIDDEN ENEMIES

THE Islinois River was too wide for effective archery and the canoe was turned toward the opposite bank where, blending with the shadows, it sped on upstream, unseen by the savages and unheard, for the paddles dipped noiselessly.

All three men knew, however, that this did not mean safety. Down-stream they might have out-distanced their pursuers, only to put leagues of hostile territory between them and Lac Mecheygan. Upstream, following the many convolutions of the river, fighting the current, there was no hope of escape after daylight came. Knowing each bend, each shallow place where they could ford or swim, the savages could easily strike across country and cut them off at dawn. To abandon the canoe would be equally fatal, for every foot of both banks would be examined in the first light of the new day.

For the present, in the darkness and with the river between them and the savages, they were safe. A few of the Islinois had attempted to follow in the canoe left behind but their unfamiliarity with the craft permitted the *coureurs de bois* to out-distance them easily. The three men drove ahead with all their strength. They could hear their pursuers on the opposite bank, and sometimes an arrow plumped into the water near them. But the stream was straight and broad and with little current for several leagues and after an hour there were no sounds of the Indians.

Basile recovered consciousness at last and attempted to rise.

"Lie still," whispered Leon as he laid aside his paddle and placed both hands on Basile's shoulders. "Don't speak above a whisper. The savages pursue us. When you feel able to sit up your blade will be welcome."

"If I am needed," was the answer, "I am well able to paddle now. There are no broken bones. I only lost all knowledge of life for a time. Where is that dog of an Englishman?"

"He is here, ahead. 'Twas he that carried you to the canoe, else you would even now be wearing pine splinters. Never mind him for the present. It needs the strength and skill of all four to escape the shrieking devils on the bank. It is the stake for all of us if we are caught. Use your blade now and settle your quarrels later."

"Very well," said Basile as he arose cautiously to his knees. "Give me a paddle. I can wait."

"Well said," Leon encouraged. "Now to work for another league. Then we can stop for breath and perhaps a plan."

All four now bent to their work and the canoe was fairly lifted from the water as the paddles went into the stream in perfect unison. They sped on, faster than the Indians could run on land, and after half an hour Michel called a halt in the shadow of a small, heavily wooded island in midriver.

"I have no breath left," he gasped as he took hold of a willow branch to anchor the canoe. "We can't keep that up for long, and there are several big bends beyond. By morning they will surely be ahead."

"And if we did outstrip them we would only run into the Miamis, who would treat us no better," said Leon.

"I have a plan," whispered Dick as he

turned in the bow. "A quarter of a league above us a stream comes in from the left. It is large enough for the canoe, so large it must come from some distance. I remember it because Michel and I stopped to shoot a deer just above it before we camped at the place where we first saw the Islinois."

"The savages are on that bank and can follow it easily," sneered Basile. "We would only be running into them."

"No, it is our only chance," declared Dick. "Ahead the river makes a turn to the right and then almost doubles back upon itself. It is at the upper end of that big bend that they will hope to be in ahead of us at daylight. They will not believe that we would turn off and let them get between us and Lac Mecheygan. If we hurry now and go up this small stream before they come to it we can leave them behind and without a trace of the direction we have taken and without a suspicion that we are not ahead. From the headwaters of this stream we can surely reach some place of safety to the north."

"Monsieur Dick is right!" agreed Michel enthusiastically. "The canoe leaves no trace. We can turn up this stream for many leagues and who knows but that we may cross over to the Rocky River that comes down from near the land of the Puans, or Ouinibegous. A Mascouten once told me that the Rocky River flowed down along the border of the Islinois country and at last entered the Misisepe."

"It is our only chance," said Leon. "Come! Let us be on the way to this stream before they reach it."

"But how do we know we will reach this Rocky River?" objected Basile.

"Even if we don't, it is better than letting these devils burn us at the stake, as they will before another night if we are not on our way," retorted Michel. "Monsieur Dick is right. It is the only thing we can do."

Again the canoe was shot swiftly upstream and in a few minutes Dick signaled from the bow that they were opposite the mouth of the river flowing in from the north. For a moment they listened intently but there was no sign of life on either shore.

"Paddle," whispered Michel. "It's a chance, but one we should be glad to take."

Silently, cautiously, each man's nerves taut, the canoe was driven close to the north bank. Alone on the water, it could be seen easily from the shore. Yet there were no savage yells, no arrows dropping about them.

"We are in time," whispered Leon. "We have headed them. Come! Up this stream before they do suspect us."

The canoe stole into the shadows of the trees bordering the smaller river as if into a tunnel and the silent paddles shot it on through the darkness. For an hour they continued, the tension growing less until, when they came to a wide, open marsh through which the stream twisted in a long series of bends and ox-bows, there was no longer fear of immediate pursuit. But none of the men even hoped for safety there and so long as the night lasted they continued to paddle.

The first signs of dawn found them five or six leagues from the Islinois River and out of the big marsh. The banks were higher, trees had come again, although the stream was narrower and twisted and turned until they would have lost all sense of direction had it not been for the stars.

"There's our salvation," whispered Leon excitedly as the stream suddenly widened in a little valley and in the center of the pond, which was about an eighth of a league across, they could see the dark shadow of a small island. "We'll crawl into the brush on that isle, hide the canoe and sleep until night. If they should come this way after us they'd never find us there."

There was a ready acceptance of this proposal as all were near exhaustion. Before daylight they and their canoe were safely hidden and, each taking his turn as look-out, they slept until nightfall.

AGAIN the hours of darkness were spent in putting more leagues between them and the Islinois River, but not long after midnight they found the stream had grown so small that further progress by canoe was impossible.

"Now we are trapped!" exclaimed Basile. "We can't go on without leaving footprints on the bank, even could we hide the canoe so that they would not find it."

"There is still the good chance that they never suspected our coming this way," objected Dick. "If we land now we need only strike straight north until we come to this Rocky River of which Michel has heard. If we are pursued there is still the possibility of our getting to the Rocky River first. When we reach that and the land of the Puans we will be safe."

"To be sure," agreed Michel. "It is the only course open to us. Dick and I will carry the canoe and you two the muskets. We can change each league."

"And perhaps carry it a dozen leagues," growled Basile.

"I'd carry it a thousand rather than have those devils on my back," declared Leon. "It is the only way out of the difficulty, so let's be at it."

They were in a country of which white men knew nothing, far off any possible water route, and they were not even certain that the Rocky River existed or that, if it did, they could reach it by traveling north. Moreover, none of the men had eaten since the night of their flight and, so long as there was danger of pursuit, they could not risk the time for, or the noise of, getting game. They had fled with only one canoe, their muskets and powder-horns and ball pouches, from which they were never separated when among strange savages.

The *coureurs de bois* were accustomed to famine as well as to feasting, however, and Dick would have been the last to complain of the weakness of hunger. The fear of the vengeance of the ravished Islinois was still with them, and all knew the fate that awaited should they be overtaken.

Accordingly as they struck off across the level prairie in the light of the stars they forgot their burdens in the desire for this unknown river. Each hour they walked a league, and each hour the bearers of the canoe exchanged their burden for the scarcely less heavy or awkward and irksome muskets and powder-horns.

The agreement they had made for carrying the canoe kept Dick and Michel together, but the heavy work left little opportunity for discussion, even had Dick felt that it would be possible to gain Michel's support in his quarrel. That Basile was allowing no time to elapse before making plans for revenge was easily evident in the manner in which he drew Leon ahead that they might talk without being heard.

There was nothing, however, the Virginian could do. His only chance for safety lay in remaining with the *coureurs de bois* and so great was the problem that confronted them he put aside his trouble with Basile for future settlement and gave his entire attention to searching for signs of the much desired river.

The country was either flat or rolling, usually treeless. Once their hunger was doubled when they encountered a small herd of buffalo and were compelled to go on without trying a shot. Twice their hopes were aroused when the land dipped and they were forced to skirt a marsh. But each time higher land came to rob them of their hopes for a river.

Daylight brought them to a forest of oaks and under their shelter they continued.

"Not another step will I carry that beast!" cried Leon when his turn came to abandon one end of the canoe.

"You'll only exchange that burden for the tortures of purgatory," declared Michel. "Look at the trail we are leaving. Those savages could follow it with their eyes swathed. Come on! Wood usually means water in this prairie country. The river may be just beyond."

Half an hour more brought them to the banks of a broad stream and without the waste of a moment they put it between them and possible pursuit.

"Noise or no noise," said Michel as they landed on the north side, "I'm going to have a stag for breakfast."

"I'll go with you," said Basile as he picked up his musket. "Two shots are no louder than one."

Dick and Leon carried the canoe out of sight behind some bushes and lay down to rest. In less than an hour the hunters returned with a young buck and the good news that they had discovered traces of a recent camp of Mascouten hunters.

"It means we are in their country and the Islinois will not dare follow us much farther," said Michel. "We can risk the smoke of a fire so long as we have chanced the noise of a shot, and then we'll put a few more leagues between us and the Islinois."

They ate the meat when it was little more than scorched. After the meal, which left little of the buck, Basile took the hide and, inserting his knife in the center, began to cut around and around until he had a thong half an inch wide and several yards long. Silently he handed one end to Michel and, passing it back and forth through the fire, they burned off the hair. Once or twice during the operation Basile glanced at Dick, a hard smile on his cruel mouth.

"Now we'll be going," he said when they had finished. "We should be a dozen leagues farther away by night and perhaps in the village of the Mascoutens."

All day they paddled toward the northeast and not once was there evidence that they were followed by the Islinois. Because fear of the savages was still with them, however, they paddled swiftly and without speaking. Hour after hour they went on and on, silent, watchful, always swiftly.

Even in the silence, and despite the natural cause of it, Dick began to feel the presence of a barrier between him and the other three. The hostility of Basile was to be expected and from it he knew that, when safety was certain, there would come a decisive struggle. But Michel and Leon, amiable, carefree, light-hearted, he had once considered firm friends. That his apparent criticism of their plundering methods should have lost for him some of their regard he had no doubt, but he had not expected the complete change in them that he now felt.

In the first hurried flight from the Islinois and the hours of anxious search for the Rocky River this enmity had not been so evident. Now the more leagues they put between them and the aroused savages the more Dick sensed the fact that he was not only going deeper and deeper into an unknown land but that he was going alone. He remembered how Basile and Leon had gone on ahead, how he had overheard their voices in argument when they made the long portage in the night. He recalled the alacrity with which Basile had joined Michel in the hunt that morning.

But night and a camp on the bank of the river came before he found a tangible basis for his suspicions. Michel wandered off with his musket as soon as they landed and returned with another buck and again with news of a still more recent camp of Mascouten hunters. Basile's interest was at once aroused and, on one pretext or another, he drew first Leon and then Michel aside.

BUT still nothing was said, nothing was done, no mention was made of the disaster to their plans on the river of the Islinois. Then, after supper, when each had selected a comfortable place beside the fire, Basile spoke:

"Michel! Leon! You will remember that on the Chicagon I protested against taking this Englishman with us. You will remember that we started from Montreal with the fixed plan of trading among the Islinois, and you will remember the hopes we had for a most successful venture. You will remember, too, your debts, which must be paid on your return or there is to be no return.

"What has happened? This Englishman forced himself upon us, with pleasant words enough but with what actions?"

"I'll back up those actions with words, and the words, in turn, with more action!" interrupted Dick angrily. "As for your acts, Basile Pombert, there are no words to express the scorn of an honest man for them."

"And he is the man who bragged that he is an outlaw!" laughed Leon. "The one who came to the French country to gain freedom, to escape the law. He talks like a blackrobe."

"I came for freedom, yes," replied Dick, his anger increased by Leon thus openly alining himself with Basile. "But I do not call it freedom to gain the opportunity to rob, to cheat, to ravish. I sought freedom, but not a license from Satan himself, nor did I seek the arts of the imps of hell. An outlaw I am, but a man may flee the wrath of a king and still be honest, still remember that he is better than the beasts."

"He should have been a Jesuit," laughed Basile. "He should carry the cross, not honest brandy, to the pagan savages. Would not that Père Marquette at Michilimakinac have rejoiced to hear him?"

Angry as Dick was he was not without caution, and in this jeering attitude of Basile he recognized a greater danger than he had expected. The Frenchman felt that he was playing a safe hand, that he was merely testing his power, merely whetting his appetite for the enjoyment of the final victory.

Dick's contempt for the man, his repulsion, and his memory, still vivid, of that last night on the Islinois, caused him to minimize the danger.

"Call it the cross or what you will," he retorted angrily, "had I been told, Basile, what you planned doing to those innocent people you ravished I would have prevented it, even if I had been forced to wring your serpent's neck to accomplish it."

"And accomplish it you did, son of an

English dog!" cried Basile, displaying anger for the first time. "As I was telling Leon and Michel, we planned much, we hoped to return to the St. Lawrence with the wherewithal for a glorious time. What has prevented it? This English swine forced himself upon us and then robbed us of our hard-earned reward. His talk is pretty, but his actions are those of a spy, as I first said, and that night on the Islinois, I tell you, he showed his real self. I saw him talking with this girl, the one who left these marks on my face, and with her father, and he told them a false story of our being robbers, brigands, even murderers. What happened? This old man warned another village, and here we are, penniless, fugitives, victims of an English spy."

"You lie, Pombert," interrupted Dick in a low voice. "You lie and you know you lie. But I will say this. Had I known what you intended, had I known how to prevent what you did, I would have taken any risk to defeat you. From the first you have shown yourself to be a sneak, an ungrateful cur, a beast in the shape of a man, but with no other human attributes. I would not try to shame you by reminding you that, had I not carried you to the canoe, you would even now be a shriveled cinder on an Islinois stake. I claim no credit for that. It was a selfish act, for I was only saving you for death at my own hands."

The Virginian had spoken calmly but in deadly earnest and as he finished he started to rise. Instantly Basile rolled across the ground and grasped him about the knees. Leon and Michel, springing to their feet, threw themselves at Dick's shoulders and waist. Striking, exerting all his strength to throw them off, he went down beneath them and before he had ceased struggling the long strip of rawhide Basile had cut held his arms and legs.

The three Frenchmen, panting, wiping the perspiration from their faces, took seats across the fire from their captive.

"Now what?" asked Leon.

"A big canoe and a full one on our return to the St. Lawrence before Winter sets in," answered Basile.

"And you can talk like that without brandy?" demanded Michel in mock amazement.

"Be silent, you two with the sheep's heads!" commanded Basile sternly. "You are like horses. You can work if well driven, but, turned loose in a field, how much could you plow? I planned the most successful endeavor of our lives. You meddled, took this English dog along despite my wishes, and see what has happened. Tell me, both of you, who of us has the head? Who can plan?"

"You are right, Basile," answered Leon humbly. "We have been wrong. Lead and we will follow, anywhere. Is it not so, Michel?"

"Even to this Misisepe, be it fresh or salt, full of monsters or no," was the reply.

"Then listen," said Pombert, pressing his advantage, "and you shall learn how we shall drift down the St. Lawrence with a big canoe and a full one before Winter comes.

"We can not go many leagues up this river without finding the Mascoutens. You have heard tell of them. They are warlike, but there are not enough of them to be successful. They like prisoners and the pleasures of the stake but have few captives. They are tricky and they are vain. What do you think would please them most?"

"A cask of brandy," offered Leon.

"To be gone in a night! No! We have that which they would desire most, a white man for slave, for prisoner, for torture. Do you not see? A word or two in the chief's ear, a story of the English king who sent a man to take the lands of the Mascoutens for himself, of how, if he returns to his ruler it will be to lead an army into this peaceful land and slay every savage. We can say that by torturing this prisoner their young men will become strong and brave, so strong and brave they will be successful even against the Longhouses.

"They have never had a white prisoner. It will be easy for us to mold their simple minds to the belief that torturing one releases to them all the white man's strength. Oh, no!" and he grinned across the fire at Dick. "We'll make this Englishman long for the noose of his king."

"And how does that load the canoe?" asked Michel.

"You fool!" replied Basile. "Must I even expand your chest so that your lungs may receive the breath of life? For this great gift to them we will receive a big canoe and every pelt of every kind in their village. This English devil lost us a year's profits. Let him repay us."

The next morning only three paddles dipped into the waters of the Rocky River. In the bottom of the canoe, still bound, lay Dick Jeffreys. All night the Frenchmen had taken turns guarding him and now he was constantly under the eye of all. Once in the night he had pleaded with Michel, sought to win again the friendship the *coureur de bois* had first displayed, only to find that the influence of Basile, coupled with the poverty of the trio, held full sway.

At noon they entered a long stretch of the river with rounded bluffs, heavily wooded, on either side. At the far end where the river curved was a flat, treeless expanse and grouped in the center of this were a score or more of *cabines*.

"The Mascoutens!" cried Leon from the bow.

"And see that you leave all the talk to me," cautioned Basile. "I want no bungling here."

For a day the Frenchmen feasted with the savages, observing the native custom of delaying the statement of a visit's object. They were given a *cabine* in which to keep their prisoner, who was an object of much curiosity until Basile spread the word that Dick was not a Frenchman but a devil from the other side of the stinking water. And always Michel or Leon were on guard at the hut. At night all three slept there.

"When do we begin?" demanded Leon irritably the second night. "Let's get this over and be on our way."

"Tomorrow," answered Basile. "I will hold a talk with the chiefs alone. By night it should all be arranged."

The next forenoon Michel and Leon remained in the hut while Basile went to confer with the leading men. The two *coureurs de bois* settled themselves comfortably for a long wait, for they knew the deliberate habits of the savages in discussion. They were wholly unprepared, therefore, when their leader returned in a few minutes and thrust his head into the low door.

"Settled so soon!" cried Leon. "Pombert, you are capable of being prime minister to the king. Were they glad of the chance to have our friend for the stake?"

"He'll burn, and to the tune of the shrieks of his yellow heart," was the answer. "But something bigger is afoot. Come and I'll tell you."

CHAPTER VIII

BASILE GROWS AMBITIOUS

DICK, alert for any opportunity but helpless in the bonds with which he was tied, glanced quickly about the bare *cabine*. It was the first time he had been left alone and he looked for a forgotten knife, hatchet, anything that might cut or saw through the rawhide.

From outside he could hear the low tones of Basile but he did not try to overhear. Whatever this new plan of the Frenchman it would be fiendish enough and now no opportunity for escape must be overlooked.

Dick could see nothing of value to him from where he lay. He rolled over so that he might have a view of that part of the *cabine* behind him, but the floor was bare and nothing hung from the empty walls. As he was about to roll back to his original position something sharp pricked him on one shoulder.

Hitching himself around, he began to feel in the dry grass on which he had been lying. His hands were bound closely to his sides but he could move his numbed fingers lightly—at last they struck a hard substance. His heart leaped at the first touch, for instantly he recognized the object as a flint arrow-head. He clutched it so tightly one keen edge cut the skin between his fingers. The pain brought a smile for the worth of the tool was proved. Though it caused torture he worked his fingers around until he could slip the flint into the pocket in his leggings and then, content, rolled back to his original position.

For the first time he became conscious of the voices outside the hut. Basile, greatly excited, was talking more loudly, his whispering tones penetrating farther than had he spoken in his usual coarsened growl.

"Has not started to trade because he expects to Winter in the West," Dick overheard. "His voyageurs deserted him and he is trying to employ Mascoutens to man his canoes."

"Did you learn his name?" asked Leon.

"No, but from what the savages say there is no doubt but that he is Antoine Goddin."

"A licensed trader, eh?" said Michel.

"And on his last journey!" exclaimed Basile fiercely. "Next to this Englishman there is none I hate more. It was three years ago, in west of the Sault Ste. Marie, among the Saulteurs, that he robbed me of a year's profits."

"Is he the one who told the savages that you were plundering them that he might get the trade for himself?" asked Leon.

"The same. A sanctimonious wretch who has the good will of the blackrobes, talks of laws, boasts that he trades legally, by the king's sanction, and speaks of this land as 'the new Empire of France.' I swore that some day I would cross his trail, and the day has come."

"But there is risk in killing a Frenchman," objected Michel. "Savages do not count."

"Risk!" exclaimed Basile. "Have you, too, absorbed the faint-heartedness of the Englishman? Think, man! Never before has a white man penetrated to this river. None will come for years afterward, and are not the Mascoutens known to be evil, deceitful? Have not his voyageurs deserted him, and will not that be known? Is he not camped alone on the river? Does an Indian hatchet leave a different mark when swung by a white man?

"What if this licensed trader returns with wealth. Do you not think more of his breed will follow? Then what of us who carry not the sanction of kings? We will be driven out of this land that we have discovered, out of the lands wherein our profits lay. You sicken me, Michel, with your tremors. But in any event he is mine. I am to be avenged."

"After that what plan?" asked Leon.

"We have a trading outfit, goods and brandy. We will Winter to the north and in the Spring we will be on our way to the St. Lawrence with heavy canoes."

"But the Englishman?"

"He will still pay the price, will still buy us a canoeload of beaver skins. There is a band of Hurons on Lac Mecheygan, driven far from their homes by the Longhouses. We will take this Englishman to them, tell them he is Dutch, from the Dutch colony at New Amsterdam, and they will give us every skin in their village for him, for did not the Dutch, and the English, too, furnish the Longhouses with muskets and powder?"

"A double haul!" cried Leon enthusiastically.

"Yes, and a double revenge for me," replied Basile venemously. "I have a mind to stay and see the Hurons play with the Englishman."

"And when do we——" Michel hesitated.

"When do we brain this Goddin and take his outfit?" sneered Basile. "I have a mind to turn the Englishman over to the Mascoutens now if his presence among us fills you with such qualms. Today we go on up the river until we learn where he has his camp. Then tonight! And we will be rich men again."

Basile hurried away to confer with the chiefs of the village and Michel and Leon entered the hut. They were silent and did not look into the corner where Dick lay. The Virginian, who had been bound so long his legs and arms were becoming numb, lifted his head.

"Michel," he said, "there was a time when we might have become fast friends. We liked each other then and there should be no cause for hard feelings now, no reason why you can not grant me one small favor."

Michel looked at him but did not reply.

"This rawhide is drying and shrinking," Dick continued. "See how it is cutting into my flesh. Already the feeling is gone. Do me this one favor, Michel, and loosen the bonds a little."

"Leave them as they are," advised Leon.

"And the savages will be cheated, and you, too," answered Dick. "Another day and my legs and arms will be dead."

"There is something in that, Leon," said Michel as he took a hesitating step toward the prisoner. "See, the hide has cut into his flesh. It will do no harm to loosen them. Besides, he will always be in our sight."

He crossed over and knelt beside Dick. The green hide had stiffened and contracted and it was with difficulty that he untied the knots. As the blood rushed into his extremities Dick writhed and groaned from the excruciating pain. His wrists and legs were swollen and Michel, when he rebound them, could not refrain from leaving the thongs as loose as possible.

Faint from the pain but thankful that it had not come when he had severed the bonds himself, Dick lay back with his face to the wall. In a short time, he knew, the blood would be running in all his veins, the numbness and swelling would almost disappear, and when the time for his escape came he would have the use of his arms and legs.

DICK'S determination to escape had grown twofold since he had overheard Basile's infamous plans. Not only his own life but that of this unsuspecting Frenchman was at stake and all the repugnance and horror with which he had watched the rape of the Islinois was redoubled at the thought of Basile's treachery. Seeking freedom himself when he had left Virginia, he was appalled at this interpretation of it by the depraved Pombert.

"We start at once!" cried Basile as he entered the *cabine* suddenly. "I have explained that we go to visit our countryman and that we will return. Word has been received that Goddin is no more than six leagues up the river. We will start at once so as to find his camp by dark."

With the Mascoutens thronging about in their curiosity over the spectacle of two white men carrying another securly bound, they went down to their canoe. Dick was laid in the bottom and the Frenchmen paddled off.

If Basile originally had intended to keep his plans from Dick by calling Leon and Michel outside the *cabine* to discuss them, he abandoned the idea once they were under way. The man was exuberant, already spending the gains of this new crime. He found time, too, to taunt Dick, to describe in detail what he intended to do when they arrived at the camp of the licensed trader, and the Virginian, though he lay quietly with his eyes closed, resolved that nothing could stand in the way of his liberty that he might rid the earth of this evil spirit.

Leon and Michel, wholly lacking in moral conception rather than instinctively criminal, failed to respond to Basile's mood. They paddled steadily, their eyes always searching the banks ahead for the camp of the trader. But they went to their work without enthusiasm, as if it were a disagreeable task that must be done and then forgotten.

Late in the afternoon they began to go more slowly, reconnoitering from each bend, becoming impatient when sunset approached.

"These cursed savages make a league to their own liking," complained Basile. "We have gone eight leagues, not six, and still there is no sign of him."

"Be quiet," whispered Michel from the bow as he threw out his paddle and drew the canoe backward and toward the bank. "There is smoke ahead, around the next bend."

Silently they stepped ashore, leaving Dick in the canoe, and crawled through the brush along the bank to see if they had reached their destination. While Dick was still undecided whether he should cut his bonds then or later they returned and immediately began to discuss their plans.

"He's on the other bank, less than a quarter of a league away," said Basile. "Michel, slip through the brush up the shore and find a place where you can watch him. See if there is any one with him, how many canoes are there, and how the land lies behind his camp. Be back at dark."

Dick was lifted from the canoe and Basile with his hand in the Virginian's collar, dragged him up the bank and back into the brush. The two then carried the canoe out of sight and sat down to await Michel's report.

Basile, now that his revenge was near, became exuberant. He recounted in detail the wrongs for which he held Antoine Goddin responsible, sneered at the circuitous traits for which the trader was known, and exultantly described how he would end his life.

"If he is asleep I will waken him before I strike, let him see who it is that is avenging past wrongs," he declared.

"You lie, Pombert!" exclaimed Dick. "You are too much of a coward to strike a man except in the back, and, by Heaven, if these thongs were off my legs and arms I'd prove it now."

"Those thongs will stay there until the Hurons, thinking you are a Dutch friend of the Iroquois, burn them off," taunted Basile. "And no more from you or I'll give you a taste of what the savages can do."

"I well believe that you are capable of it," replied Dick. "I do not doubt but that it is Longhouse blood itself that gives you that swarthy countenance and that black heart."

With a cry of rage Basile sprang to where Dick lay.

"Beware, black heart," the Virginian warned in a low tone. "Touch me now and my face will appear before you as you swing your bloody hatchet tonight. Lay a hand on me now and after the stake I'll follow you wherever you go, and at last to the fire that surely waits for you when the savages catch their ravisher."

The Frenchman recoiled with a mumbled oath and Dick laughed outright at this result of the curse he had placed upon the other.

"Go back and boast some more, Pombert," he said. "It amuses me."

Basile was strangely quiet until the return of Michel just at dusk with a report that the trader was Goddin himself and that he was alone in his camp, with two large canoes drawn up on the bank and a large *cabine* in which his goods undoubtedly were stored. The trader had cooked his supper and was smoking his evening pipe when Michel left.

"Now," began Basile eagerly, "to work! We'll take the canoe, cross the river, enter the forest and come upon him from the rear. He will be asleep soon, and remember that it is I who am to enter his *cabine*. Tonight men, tonight we will be rich! No one carries a greater outfit out of the St. Lawrence than this Goddin."

"What of him while we are about this?" asked Leon as he nodded toward the brush where Dick lay.

"Let him lie until we return," was the command. "Look after his bonds, Michel, and we will be off."

Michel bent over Dick, felt of the thongs about his ankles and those that bound his arms to his sides and reported him secure.

"In a few minutes then," said Basile, "it will be dark and we will go."

As he spoke Dick worked his fingers into his pocket and grasped the piece of flint. Not a second could be wasted. Time spelled life both for Goddin and himself. Not only must he reach the camp before the others but he was under the added disadvantage of having to cross the river without a canoe.

THE moment he heard the Frenchmen lift their canoe from the brush he was busy with his flint. It was difficult work for his hands were still slightly numbed and he had to bend them at a painful angle to reach a thong with his flint. He had cut half-way through when he was surprised by the sudden appearance of Leon and Basile.

"We'll make sure of him and tie him to this tree," said the leader as he grasped Dick's collar and heaved him farther into the brush. "We'll do it this way so that he not only will be here when we return but will get a little taste of what is coming to him."

As he talked he tied one end of a thong around Dick's ankles, passed it around the tree and then beneath the captive's armpits. He turned Dick on his side with the small of his back against the tree and then drew the thong tight, hauling the feet and shoulders around until Dick feared that his back would be broken.

"Now we are certain," said the Frenchman as he gave the knot a final jerk.

A moment later Dick heard them step into the canoe and in the silence that followed he knew that they had gone. Immediately he was at work with his flint. But now his difficulties were increased as his right hand, in which he held the arrow-head, was wedged between his body and the tree. He could, however, still reach a thong around the waist, and to which his wrists were bound, and painfully he began to cut it through.

Twice before it snapped exhaustion forced him to stop. But his first success brought added determination and although his position caused excruciating pain and the perspiration poured from his face, he continued frantically to saw at his bonds.

A half-hour went by and his hands were not free though he had cut through the thong in several places. From the plans of the three, and the report of Michel concerning the location of Goddin's camp, he might even then be too late. It occurred to him to call, to shout as loudly as he could with the hope that he might arouse the trader and thereby put him on his guard. As he strained to fill his lungs for the effort the bonds about his waist loosened and his hands fell away from his sides.

Exultantly he tugged until both wrists were free and then, though the effort brought torture to cramped muscles, he lifted his right hand above his head and cut the thong that held shoulders and heels together around the tree. The next instant he was sitting up, freeing his legs of the coils.

Dick's one plan was to reach Goddin's camp in time to warn him. So great was the urgency he was able to rise despite the pain in every muscle, but when he attempted to walk he wondered vaguely why he should suffer such torture for the sake of a man he had never seen. But the remembrance of Basile's evil face came to him and he struggled on northward along the river bank, teeth tightly clenched to prevent his crying out at the agony each step cost.

As he walked the pain became less and when at last he saw the lighter spot against the dark forest across the river and knew he was opposite the trader's tent he felt able to swim the stream. He plunged in at once, waded as far as he could, and then struck out for the opposite shore.

The bank sloped up gradually from the water to the door of the tent, or *cabine* as the French called it, which was set in the center of a small opening in the forest. For a moment Dick watched and listened and then began to crawl forward on his hands and knees.

"Stay where you are or I will shoot," came a low voice from the thick brush at his left.

Dick's first thought was that one of the three Frenchmen had seen him and he was about to run for cover when the even, cool tone impressed itself upon him for the first time.

"Monsieur Goddin," he whispered. "Is that you?"

"It is and I'll shoot if you move. Lie where you are."

Dick saw a figure coming toward him from the brush.

"Monsieur Goddin," he whispered, "I am a friend, though you never saw me. But three Frenchmen are about to attack you from the forest. Thank God I have been in time."

"You are an Englishman," said Goddin. "Your story is as strange as your presence in this country."

"For your life, sir, do not speak above a whisper," implored Dick. "You can see that I am unarmed. Go back to the brush and I will follow and explain. But pray make no noise."

Goddin hesitated a moment and then walked backward toward the place where he had hidden. Dick crawled after him.

"Now," said Goddin, who still kept his musket aimed at Dick, "what is this nonsense about three Frenchmen attacking a countryman?"

"Do you know a *coureur de bois* named Basile Pombert?" Dick asked in reply.

"You have proven your words," was the quick answer in an entirely different tone. "I need listen to no more except the details of Pombert's villainy. And I daresay that those co-devils, Leon La Gard and Michel Charon, are with him."

"They are," answered Dick, "and all three may be even now at the edge of this clearing. They left me across the river, below the next bend, securely tied, they believed, and paddled across and planned to come upon you from the rear when you were asleep."

"Twice foiled," laughed Goddin softly. "There is a big swamp directly behind the tent through which they are probably floundering, and you will notice yourself, monsieur, that I was not asleep in my tent. Does Pombert take me for a fool to sleep so when I am alone among strange savages? My bed was here and you wakened me. They would have done the same."

"Then," Dick began.

"Not a mite less thanks to you, monsieur, and I will show that Antoine Goddin never forgets a favor, or the reverse. But all that may wait until tomorrow. Now we will plan to rid New France of this Pombert and thereby merit the respect of all honest men. The others are only tools of his and will stand or fall as the battle swings. Listen! I heard a broken twig."

CHAPTER IX

THE MEDICINE MAN

"LISTEN, monsieur," whispered Dick when he and Goddin were safely hidden in the bushes. "I placed a curse on Pombert today, not that I believe in it but because I knew that he would, and I was not sure that I would free myself and warn you in time. I told him that when he struck your sleeping figure with his hatchet my face would appear before him."

"There is only a roll of blankets for him to murder in the tent," answered the Frenchman. "A shot from my musket at this distance is ample."

"But Pombert is mine. I told him I would kill him some day."

"It is not well to hate so, my friend."

"It is not hate. It is a loathing, like a man has for a snake. Pombert is an evil thing, a vile thing, and there is no murder in killing him. Besides, I still feel that green thong tightening into my flesh."

Goddin laughed.

"You have hardly proved your point,

monsieur, but you have the desire, and he is yours. Here is my musket."

"No, a hatchet is what I want, what he deserves. And I'll be waiting for him in the tent. He will see my face when he is ready to strike."

Goddin handed the Virginian a small ax that he had placed in his nest in the brush and instantly Dick was worming his way forward in the grass. The Frenchman looked, saw him start, and then nothing moved in the darkness.

"I did not know an Englishman had blood so warm," he mused. "But he is a man, and I think a man after my own liking."

Goddin did not have long to wait. It was too dark for him to see a figure against the thick foliage behind the camp but he could distinguish a shadow between him and the white tent. It flitted across, silently, quickly, and he knew Pombert had come.

Dick, in the manner he had learned from the Indian boys in his youth, had gained the tent without the possibility of being seen from the thicket behind it. The grass was long and his movements so silent a snake could not have done it more quietly. He slipped in under the flap almost on top of the bed Antoine Goddin had arranged for just such an emergency. Behind it, piled to the peak, were bales of goods. Against these Dick leaned, waiting, his hatchet ready.

There was a faint sound beside the tent, a pause, then further movement. In a moment the tent flap began to move back and Dick heard the rustle of a body rubbing against the canvas. The triangle of blackness lost its clear-cut shape and a dark figure arose, one arm lifted.

"Beware, Pombert!" Dick warned in sepulchral tones.

A shriek that seemed to rip open the tent burst from the Frenchman's throat. He staggered back, helpless in his terror.

"Come, craven," Dick said sharply. "Lift your hand to strike. I could not even kill a snake that runs."

The words had their desired effect. With a second cry, now of rage, Basile sprang forward, a knife uplifted. His every movement was silhouetted against the white tent while the Virginian's position could be distinguished only by his voice. Dick stepped to one side and the head of his hatchet crushed into Pombert's skull. Without a sound the Frenchman collapsed. He had hardly touched the ground before Dick had gripped his collar and dragged him outside.

As he stood there, about to call to Goddin, the crashing of brush in the forest behind the camp told him of the presence of the others.

"Leon!" he cried. "Michel! Come and get the carrion!"

The crashing only grew louder and Dick laughed.

"Come, Monsieur Goddin," he called in a loud voice. "We live in a safer world."

The Frenchman ran swiftly across the clear ring.

"Monsieur," he said solemnly as he saw the body lying at Dick's feet, "I and all honest men owe you their thanks. It is a strange thing that liberty appears in such various guises. To Pombert it meant a chance to rob, to plunder, to kill, and to escape punishment. Thank God that same freedom attracts men who think and see in straight lines, for no finer land ever lay beneath the sun than that in which we are, monsieur, and it must be saved for those who will not abuse it."

"Who are you?" demanded Dick curiously, "to speak and think in this manner?"

"A *coureur de bois*, monsieur."

"But he?" and Dick touched Pombert's body with his foot.

"Also a ranger of the forests, and one of too many who are giving us the name of thieves and ravishers, of licentious outlaws, of defilers of a simple people and a fair land. But we are not all thus, as you shall learn if you stay in this country. To be a forest runner does not always mean to be a thief.

"But what of you, monsieur? You must pardon my curiosity, but an Englishman in a land where Englishmen have never been, of which they do not even know, and a man of your character in company with Basile Pombert—you can see that the whole is very strange."

"But there is nothing strange in my story," replied Dick, "and I will tell it to you. But first let us rid ourselves of what remains of Pombert. He was made in God's image even if wholly devoid of his precepts. I would not like to think that wild beasts devoured even the body of such a man."

"We will carry it into the brush and cover it with a blanket," said Goddin. "In the morning there will be light, and now you need a fire for you are wet."

THEY carried the body away from the tent and built a fire, for they had no fear of Leon and Michel. While Dick warmed and dried himself he gave his history, beginning as he had done on the Des Plaines River with his boyhood, his wanderings, his encounter with Sir William Berkeley, his escape from Virginia, his hazardous journey down the Ohio, his discovery of Lac Mecheygan and his finding the *coureurs de bois*.

Throughout the recital Dick spoke lightly, recounting his conversation with Sir William in detail because he still laughed over it himself.

"My faith, monsieur!" Goddin exclaimed after his hearty laughter had interrupted the tale. "You have the spirit of the French, the Latin lightness of humor. I did not know that Englishmen could even appreciate satire. They have always been pictured to me as slow of wit and inclined to be morose."

"Perhaps I am not an Englishman," replied Dick seriously. "How long have you lived in this land beyond the Western ocean?"

"Twenty years and more."

"And I was born in it. Do you not think, monsieur, that birth in such a land as this, or a long life in it, instils something in the heart that is entirely different from that of the man in Europe?"

"I am sure of it," was the answer. "I have often thought so. It has already begun. Your own Pilgrims to the Plymouth country, the Huguenots from mine own France who settled in La Floride only to perish, they are the straws. But what led to your trouble with Pombert?"

Dick told of the pillaging of the Islinois, of the flight and of Pombert's attempt to obtain revenge and to recoup by giving him to the Indians as a prisoner.

"I feel," said Goddin solemnly, "that you have twice saved my life, my friend. I was on my way to the country of the Islinois, of whom I had heard. Now it would be folly to go on. The story of Pombert's treachery will spread far and it will ill fare a Frenchman who ventures among them. Now I must return to the country south of Lac Superior, on the waters of the Miscousing, or Ouisconsin, as it is called, where I have Wintered before. I had hoped to return with bales of the skins of wild cattle, of which I have heard, but now will take beaver instead. What are your plans?"

"Plans!" laughed Dick. "Where have I had time for planning? I had hoped to find the French and lead the life of the *coureurs de bois*. After what I saw of the methods of Pombert I knew it was impossible."

"Would you come with me as voyageur? I am without men, and your profits, you know, are fixed by law. The voyageurs receive half after all expenses are paid and divide it among themselves."

"I will do so gladly," replied Dick eagerly, "but only on condition that I go as your friend. It is not that I would escape the labor. You are welcome to all I have. But I would not earn so generous a share after half the journey has been made."

"I would be glad to have you with me as a friend," said Goddin warmly, "and the profits will be settled to your satisfaction. I am expecting four Indians in the morning to help me with the canoes and the goods. I had made arrangements for them to go south but they will more willingly go north. Come and share my bed, for you must be tired."

There began for the young Virginian the life of which he had dreamed. The pleasant Summer waned and the wonderful Fall came, and always they traveled northward. Large lakes and little rivers that flowed sluggishly or tumbled over rocks, creeks too small for paddling the heavily-loaded canoes, portages in swamp, forest and prairie, each was traversed, and each began to signify to Dick a new link in the friendship which bound Goddin and himself.

Here was no villainy, no plan for plunder or murder, no thought of a quick dash into a new country to despoil and leave a trail of rape and poisoned passion. Here was no desire to abuse what seemed nothing less than a Heaven-granted privilege, the right to wander at will through this wonderfully fertile country, to live in the tranquility of that peace which only the wide places know.

As they traveled on and on, crossing from one watercourse to another, watching the character of the land change constantly and yet always remain fair, Dick began to question as to its extent.

"No man knows," was Goddin's answer. "It is my desire to find out some day, to go on and on into the west until I come to the sea. It was this desire that first sent me into the country around the uppermost of these great lakes, and according to my calculations and plans another year or two should see me on my way."

"To the South Sea, the Gulf of California?" asked Dick eagerly.

"I often doubt if that is what I will find," said Goddin. "For ten years now I have traded in the district around Michilimakinac. I have talked with Saulteurs from beyond Lac Superior, with the Hurons and Outaouas, Ouinibegous, Outagamis, Mascoutens, Renards, Sakis and even with the Nadouaissioux, who live farther to the west than any tribe white men have ever seen. I have listened to *coureurs de bois* who have been in places of which they dare not speak when they return to the St. Lawrence, and I have questioned other forest rangers, like Nicholas Perrot, Raddison and Groseilliers, and with Jesuits who are always seeking new pagan peoples, and all these are men who do speak of the places they have seen.

"If you believe all that you hear you would go mad. I think it is the white man, and the white man's hope, that has given rise to the story of the Red Sea being near us, that and the savage legends of stinking water, by which they mean salt. My own opinion, based upon reports from all sources and arrived at after much weighing and sifting and balancing, is that we are still a long way from the Gulf of California.

"The 'great water,' the Misisepe, of which the savages speak, is only a river I feel certain, but a large river like the St. Lawrence and flowing through an immense country. Great streams come in from the west and I believe one could travel almost a thousand leagues and still fail to reach the Eastern ocean, the way to the Indies.

"The white man hopes for the South Sea and pearls and gold. He grasps eagerly at tales of great water and strange people, forgetting that the savage is fearful of unknown lands and prone to believe in monsters and unnatural things. I have even talked with savages who, I am certain, have been on the Misisepe, and within two years I expect to be there myself. The cost of such an expedition is great, but I have been saving and after another visit to Montreal I will start."

THEY spoke often of this "great water" and of what might lie beyond it. Dick was continually amazed by the extent of Goddin's travels, his knowledge of the various savage nations and the districts they claimed as their own. The Frenchman was generous with his information and the young Virginian, finding romance in every word, absorbed it to the last detail. He learned, too, the names and histories of many Frenchmen, *coureurs de bois*, men who had traveled far, endured much, only to fail to receive recognition from France for all their efforts.

"It is a strange thing that sends men into unknown places," said Goddin one night. "But since the world began I imagine men have done it. They risk their lives, everything, endure incredible hardships, and they die only with the satisfaction that they were first of their race in some part of the world. You have the soul of an explorer, Monsieur Dick. Why do you not join me in this journey I have planned. Perhaps we might discover this 'great water,' learn a little of the land beyond."

The words brought a smile to Dick's eyes which he could not conceal and Goddin, seeing his mirth, angry, hurt, stared at him in silence.

"Pardon me, monsieur," the Virginian begged contritely. "My sense of humor is ever ready to give offense. But there is some cause for laughter. I scorned the chance, even to save my neck from the noose, to find this land for one king. Now, after all my adventures in a quest for freedom, you ask me to help find it for another. Sir William Berkeley promised me honor to serve King Charles, to take in his name a land he would never see, and you ask me to do the same for still another who believes that God gave him the right to persecute honest men. Think you then that there can be no kingless land?"

"Do you remember your asking me if I believed that this land and the air above it instil something in the heart of a man which is unknown in Europe?" asked Goddin in answer. "I do believe that, and I believe that some day this land will be filled with people of the white race and that they will rule themselves. Perhaps it is only a dream, perhaps I brood too much when alone in the forest, but perhaps I do see the significance of events in Europe and there is a basis for my belief in the growing power of the people to think for themselves. Yet, despite even reason, I can not help but feel that this land you and I have seen can never come under the rule of a tyrant.

"Many times when I have looked over the broad valleys, have dug my toe into the fertile soil, have traveled so far and so easily on the great waterways, I have in my imagination seen farms and villages and cities filled with a happy, contented, prosperous people. I have said this to others, once to Perrot, and have been laughed at.

"'What?' Perrot exclaimed. 'This savage land another France! A plow in these prairies! Ships on these great lakes! Antoine, you are a dreamer! This is a fur land and will remain so. It is too far and, besides, there are not people enough in all the world to fill a corner of it. It's fur we seek here and all we will ever find, and for that we should be thankful.'

"I didn't say so to him but I see the fur trade as the opening wedge only, something that will serve its purpose and be gone. That is why I am content to follow it, if by doing so I will add my mite to making the land known."

"But you have not answered my objections to finding this land in the name of a king," protested Dick.

"I was only leading up to it. You saw Pombert's idea of liberty. You must admit that even a king's is better. To me a king is only a symbol for the people he rules, and in time I believe that all kings, if they exist at all, will be only symbols of what holds the people together and gives them safety and happiness. If I found this 'great water,' this Misisepe, I would take it in the name of my king to make my act legal, but in reality I would know that I was taking it in the name of my race, my nation, the people of whom I am one, and that in time it would be theirs."

This was a new idea for Dick and he received Goddin's words in an unusually thoughtful silence. The older man, sensing the impression he had made, content to plant only the seeds in Dick's fertile mind, changed the subject to one lying more near their every-day life. It was not, however, the last discussion on this topic. Again and again it cropped up in their long talks before the camp-fire in the evenings. And always, though Dick said little, the Frenchman felt more and more certain that when the time came to do that for which he had waited he would not go alone.

Goddin was by no means always serious and in Dick's exuberant spirits as well as in his freedom from accepted beliefs he found a constant source of delight. He recognized, too, the romantic nature of the Virginian and recounted many adventures, described many scenes in strange places, and unfolded a wealth of information concerning the many savage nations which lived in the neighborhood of the great lakes.

In the early Fall they reached a place far up the Ouisconsin River where Goddin had Wintered two years before and where beaver skins were plentiful and of exceptional quality. The four Indians returned to their own country and the two white men repaired the *cabines* Goddin had used before, moved the trade-goods into one and made the other comfortable for living-quarters.

The Winter was a busy one and, for Dick, passed quickly. The savages seemed to learn miraculously that they had come and flocked to the post. Later when the snows were deep Goddin and Dick made journeys to their camps. Always they obtained fur on these trips and weekly Dick saw the pile of goods diminish and the bales of pelts increase.

It was well that the two worked at their fur-gathering in the early Winter, for with the approach of Spring came the usual famine season. And with it came a change in the industry of the savages, the fur trade stopping as suddenly as if it had been cut off with a knife. Goddin, knowing that their work in the district was finished, made plans to go down-river as soon as the ice would permit, and the fur was baled for the journey.

Daily the famine grew worse. Dick found one camp wiped out by starvation. Hunters brought their families and crowded around the post begging for food. Goddin, though his own supplies were low and he and Dick were living mostly on what little game they were able to kill, gave what he could. Even in the face of possible want for themselves the Frenchman could not refrain from giving food to the women and children who hung about his door, though he was severe enough in denouncing the men for not hunting and daily drove them out in search of game.

AMONG the Ouinibegous who sought Goddin's charity was a medicine-man who had gained sufficient prestige in his band to abandon hunting and live off the proceeds of his magic arts. Once Goddin caught him taking food he had just given to a child and drove him off with a club.

Sickness followed hard on the heels of famine and there were several deaths. The medicine-man's services were in demand, but as his patients died he became more and more bitter toward the white men, denouncing them as the cause of his failures to cure and openly insolent when he encountered Goddin alone.

One family, the first to arrive at the post, had been particularly troublesome. The father was too lazy to hunt and upon the mother fell the work of providing for the three children. Her bravery in the face of her difficulties, her refusal to complain, the ceaseless efforts she made to snare birds and hares, her self-denial and her affection for her children, had aroused the sympathy and admiration of Dick and Goddin and she was helped more generously than any of the others.

She never begged until one day when the snow had nearly gone and the ice was breaking in the river. She brought to the cabin her youngest child. Its wasted little body was wrapped in a filthy deerskin and when she threw this back the white men recoiled with exclamations of horror. The entire body of the child was covered with large ulcerated sores.

"Have you no medicines?" asked Dick.

"I have an ointment for troubles of the skin and I'll use it!" exclaimed Goddin fiercely. "It is folly to meddle with such things. The Jesuits have aroused much resentment by preaching against the medicine-man. It can only lead to trouble. But we can't abandon this woman now. She has been brave and she has done everything possible to keep her family alive. We can't desert her, Dick. I'll give her the ointment to apply."

The woman went away, her eyes alone expressing her thankfulness, and a few minutes later when Goddin found her husband on the river bank, sprawled out in the welcome sun, he chased him into the forest with a club.

"The dog lies there while she eats out her own heart!" he stormed to Dick as they sat down to dinner. "It is folly to do this, to interfere with them, for they believe that they are right in all things and secretly laugh at our methods, though they are anxious enough to have our steel and goods. But we will be leaving in a few days now and I'm willing to have taken the risk."

The Frenchman, anxious to start down the river with the first breaking of the ice, had completed his preparations in the first of April. The fur was baled, the canoes had been made ready, six Ouinibegous had been engaged to man them as far as Michilimakinac and the maize and wild oats which had been saved for the journey were sacked.

Two days after the Indian woman had been given the ointment the two white men stood on the bank of the river watching the ice grind down stream. The warm sun was welcomed on their backs, little rivulets of water flowed into the larger stream, some trees were beginning to open their buds.

"Tomorrow is the day," said Goddin. "By tonight the river will be free of ice and by the time we reach the portage into the river that will take us to Lac Mecheygan the water will be so high we can paddle across and escape the carry of nearly half a league. Run up the river to where the savages are camped, my friend, and tell the men we have engaged to be here tonight. Then we can start early in the morning."

Dick took his musket, for a buck or even a bird was welcome, and entered the forest. A half-league up the river the savages had gathered at a rapids that they might catch the first fish of the Spring run, but when Dick reached their village he found the men squatting in the sun before the *cabines* while the women were equally idle.

The sullen silence with which he was greeted instantly acquainted Dick with the fact that something was wrong. His summons to the men Goddin had engaged was received without comment. As he stood there staring about him, wondering at this sudden change in the attitude of the savages toward him, the death wail arose from the last *cabine* of the row along the river bank. The shrieks echoed up and down the stream and women all about him joined in the shrill, moaning cry until Dick was forced to stop his ears.

"Who is dead?" he asked of an old man who had always been friendly.

The savage growled an unintelligible reply and turned his back.

At a loss to explain this unfriendliness of a people who had fawned about him in their desire for food only the week before, Dick walked out of the village and sought the trail to the post. Once or twice he glanced back uneasily.

"Who cares if the beggars are unfriendly now that the fish are beginning to fill their miserable stomachs," he muttered as he walked swiftly down the trail. "We will be gone tomorrow."

A low hiss from the brush beside him brought a quick halt and he turned to see an old Indian looking out from behind a giant pine.

"Hurry back," whispered the man, whom Dick recognized as an Islinois the Ouinibegous had taken prisoner and kept as a slave. "The child for whom the Frenchman made medicine has died. The medicine-man of the band has claimed that the white men's medicine killed him. He and the child's father are even now on the way to the white men's *cabine*. Their minds are evil and they carry the white men's arrows. If you would arrive in time to save the bearded white man, do not wait. Get into the canoes and flee, for the medicine-man has stirred up all the people against you."

Before the man had finished Dick was running down the trail. He realized instantly what lay back of his reception at the village and he had learned enough of the treacherous nature of the Ouinibegous to recognize the danger to Goddin. It would not be an open attack. Neither the medicine-man nor the lazy father of the dead child would dare. It would be a stealthy stalk in the shelter of the bushes behind the *cabine*, a musket fired so close there would be no chance of missing.

His heart chilled by the fear that he would be too late to save his friend, Dick ran as he had never run before. He forgot the heavy musket in his hand, splashed heedlessly through water and swamp and melting snow, leaped over fallen trees and dashed the brush aside.

Breathless, he came at last to the clearing in which the two rough log buildings stood. It was empty of any living thing, and Dick, hysterical in his thankfulness, stopping to gulp the air into his bursting lungs, began to search the brush around the edge for a lurking figure.

As he looked Goddin stepped out through the door. In the same instant that the warning cry sprang to Dick's lips a musket roared and the Frenchman swayed, clutched at his breast and then fell at full length.

CHAPTER X

ALONE

DICK JEFFREYS, sickened, nerveless, stunned by the horror of this unthinkable crime, benumbed by the loss of his friend, stared across the clearing as if he were looking at something unreal, as if he were still in the grip of a horrible nightmare. He did not move, could not, until a black head appeared from behind a clump of bushes.

The sight brought instant action and he dashed into the open, straight toward the ambush from which Goddin had been slaughtered. So quick was his rush, so swiftly did rage spur him on, he had passed the *cabines* before the murderers had gained their feet to flee. One fired a musket wildly and then dropped it. His back was hardly turned before Dick was upon him, and the Virginian's heavy weapon crashed down through his skull.

The second savage, the father of the dead child, the one whose musket was empty and therefore who had actually fired the shot which had killed Goddin, dodged from tree to tree, but he had not run twenty yards before a ball struck him squarely in the middle of the back.

Still raging, hysterical, sobbing, his brain in a tumult, Dick turned back to the clearing. Fearful now in the presence of death, hesitating as he was about to look into the white face of the man he had grown to love, he approached Goddin's body slowly. When only a few paces away there was a slight twitch in one of the Frenchman's legs and with a glad cry the Virginian sprang forward and turned his friend over.

"Antoine!" he cried. "Open your eyes! You can not—you must not die!"

Eagerly he thrust his hand inside

Goddin's shirt. The heart was still beating.

And then through his loneliness and despair for his friend and his rage against the savages who had brought this sorrow to him another fact impressed itself. Instantly he leaped to his feet.

Over the forest had descended a sudden hush. There was no sound except the occasional lazy grinding of a laggard ice cake against the shore. Dick realized for the first time that throughout his run down the river from the Indian village, while he stood at the edge of the clearing, even while the savage's musket roared and Antoine fell, the death wail had been echoing up and down the valley. Now all was still.

Dick stood looking up the river. The village was around a bend but he knew instinctively what was transpiring there. The women had ceased their wailing, but in another moment the war-cry would take its place. The musket shots had been heard. The medicine-man and his dupe would not return. Inside of an hour thirty men would be at his heels.

Instantly he decided upon the only possible course. He stooped over Goddin just as the Frenchman opened his eyes.

"Thank God!" whispered Dick. "I must carry you to the canoe. Tell me if it hurts too much, but bear as much as you can, my friend. The savages will be here in an hour and we must be downstream as far as possible."

Dick slipped his arms gently beneath Goddin's body and staggered to his feet. A canoe was drawn partly out of the water and in this he laid his burden. Immediately he was running back to the *cabine*, to return with powder-horns, bullet pouches, an ax, blankets and several other articles that first met his eyes. He dumped these into the bow and ran back for corn, wild oats, a kettle and whatever else he could lay his hands on. With an ax he crushed in the sides of the remaining craft and five minutes after he had lifted Goddin their canoe was afloat and turned downstream.

For half an hour Dick paddled with all his skill and strength. He wanted to get as far away as possible before the pursuit started because he knew that he must stop soon to dress Goddin's wounds. A long, straight stretch of water a league below the post offered the opportunity he desired and when he reached the lower end of it he turned ashore at a point where he could command his back trail for a long distance.

As he stepped out and examined the wounded man he felt suddenly numb, suddenly alone in the vast, savage-peopled wilderness. That there could be no hope he recognized instantly, and yet because the bond between them was so strong Dick would not admit his despair. The bullet had smashed Goddin's right arm above the elbow and then entered his right lung, perhaps the left, for it had not passed out on the other side. In the bottom of the canoe was a pool of blood, and the injured man's beard was crimson.

Dick cut off the sleeve of the jacket and bound up the arm as best he could. The hole in the side was more difficult and every time he moved the body blood gushed out. He completed the task only partly to his satisfaction and as he finished Goddin again regained consciousness.

"It is bad," he whispered as his eyes met Dick's.

"Not at all," was the instant reply. "Nothing that will keep you on your back more than a few days."

"I knew you would say that, Dick, but I know what has happened. If I were in Montreal with the best surgeon in New France at hand, I could not live."

"Of course not, if you think that way. Why, Antoine, before we reach Michilimakinac you'll be helping me paddle."

"Before we reach the river of the Mascoutens you will dig a grave," answered Goddin calmly. "But why are we in a canoe, Dick?"

"I killed the dog who shot you and the medicine-man who drove him to it," was the reply. "At the village they were sullen and it needed only that to turn them into a wolf-pack."

"But the furs, and what remained of the outfit! I wanted you to have the benefit of them, my friend."

"I wouldn't touch a hide of them!" exclaimed Dick fiercely. "What is all the fur in New France to your life, Antoine? Don't speak of such a thing now."

"And my license, too," continued the Frenchman. "That is in a wallet in my pocket, Dick. Don't forget it when you bury me."

"I won't listen to you!" cried the Virginian as he sprang to his feet.

He had been watching the long stretch of river anxiously and suddenly he grasped the bow of the canoe and set it afloat.

"They are coming, Antoine," he whispered as he pushed out into the current. "Be brave, for it will be many hours before we stop again."

SEEKING always the swiftest current, exerting all his strength in every stroke, Dick drove the canoe on. Hour after hour, without losing a pace in distance or a moment in time, he kept steadily on at top speed. The fear of the pursuing Ouinibegous was constantly with him, but it was never for himself. Always there was the picture of their remorselessness, the fiendish speed with which they would bind Antoine to a tree that he might not die before they could add to his agony.

The afternoon wore on and evening came. The river bent often and sharply and there were no long stretches by which he could gauge the result of the race. At every curve he glanced over his shoulder, but darkness set in without his catching a glimpse of the pursuing craft. He was still ahead because he had only to flee, and the savages had to guard against his hiding on shore.

The night brought excessive weariness but no cessation of his efforts. He knew that he had probably held his own and now he could not afford to forego the opportunity to increase his lead. The low clouds, the absence of moon or stars, were his hope, for the savages must go slowly to make sure they did not pass him. Yet he cursed the darkness fearfully for he could no longer see the pale face of Antoine. Even as he struggled on to save him life might pass.

This dread uncertainty finally brought a halt, the first in long hours of paddling. He laid aside his blade and crawled forward.

"Antoine," he whispered.

"Yes, Dick," was the feeble answer.

"What can I do for you?"

"A drink, please. I am burning up, and cold, too."

Dick dipped the kettle over the side and lifted Goddin's head. Then he wrapped blankets about him and returned to the paddle in the stern.

More hours went by and in the silence and darkness the canoe sped on into the south. If Dick were weary, if his arms and shoulders and back ached, he did not know it. He thought only of what would happen should the Ouinibegous overtake him, of how he must outdistance them so that he could have time to care for Antoine.

As the night wore on Goddin became delirious. He rolled and tossed in the bottom of the canoe and often Dick was forced to stop and thrust him down beneath the thwarts. He talked continually, now of his boyhood in France, of his father and mother, of Montreal, the river of the Outaouas, of Perrot and Raddison and Groseilliers, of many strange nations of savages and of distant places he had seen. Sometimes he spoke in French, sometimes in the language of the Saulteurs, or the Ouinibegous, the Hurons, the Outaouas and even of the Nadouaissioux.

Dick understood them all, for he was not only familiar with the Algonquin dialects but, to his surprise, he had found that the Ouinibegous spoke a language almost the same as that of the Sheraws of his own Virginia, while that of the Nadouaissioux, who lived north of the "great water," as spoken by Goddin, showed that these widely scattered nations belonged to the same family.

The delirium added to Dick's fear for his friend since each contortion of the Frenchman's body reopened his wounds. But he dared not stop for always there was the greater fear of being overtaken by the Ouinibegous. Of them and their methods he had learned enough during his Winter among them, and from Goddin's stories, to keep him pushing on after every ounce of strength in his body seemed to have been exhausted.

The Ouinibegous had once been a powerful nation, vain, insolent, deceitful, eaters of their enemies' flesh, wholly untrustworthy, accused of more crimes than any people except the Longhouses. Now they were reduced to a comparative handful since the Islinois had avenged themselves for a bit of treachery that had brought exclamations of horror even from several nations of the savages themselves. Embittered in their defeat, their desire for conquest and torture had been sharpened. And all of this would vent itself upon the helpless Frenchman should they succeed in his capture.

In the dawn Dick kept on as he had all night. He was without a plan, without any alternative. He remembered that Goddin had told him how, in the Spring floods, it was possible to paddle across the portage from the Ouisconsin into the river which led to Lac Mecheygan. Now his hopes depended upon that being true. If he could reach this place and get through to the river of the Mascoutens he might escape in time to reach Lac Mecheygan and Michilimakinac, where there undoubtedly would be Frenchmen and proper care for his friend.

Dick estimated that, with the swift current, he was making two leagues an hour, if not a little more, and they had Wintered about fifty leagues above the portage. If he kept on paddling throughout the twenty-four hours he would come to the carrying-place at noon. There he could leave the Ouisconsin and in a short time be in waters that flowed to Lac Mecheygan.

Success in his plan depended entirely upon his ability to gain on the savages. That they would continue the pursuit he did not doubt, not only because he had killed their medicine-man and another but because they would not wish to incur the hostility of the French and the powerful nations allied with them. The Ouinibegous in their weakened condition could not afford to have news of their treachery reach Michilimakinac.

But the forenoon hours dragged by without his being able to learn whether he were half a league or five leagues in the lead. At dawn Goddin's delirium had ceased, but the bottom of the canoe was covered with blood, a red stream trickling down between Dick's knees into the stern. The wounded man's face was deadly white. He lay without movement and his eyes were closed.

The suspense became unbearable to Dick. Even if life remained it might pass at any moment. At last, in frantic desperation, heedless of consequences, he laid aside his paddle and crawled forward.

"Antoine," he whispered anxiously. "Antoine. Are you awake?"

Goddin opened his eyes and looked up at his friend.

"I was sleeping, Dick," he whispered, "but I am glad you wakened me for I feel sure that I would have passed away without knowing it."

"Come! Come! You must not speak that way!"

"Nor must you try to deceive yourself, my friend. It is coming soon, very soon, and I wish you would take me ashore, lean me against a tree in the sun and let me die looking at this fair land I have grown to love."

Dick was about to protest when Goddin's eyes closed, his face became contorted by pain and blood flowed from his mouth. The Virginian realized that what he had tried to make himself believe could not be true, that the end had come.

RETURNING to the stern he glanced back up-stream. He was at the foot of a long, straight stretch, the first he had passed since daylight. Ahead the river turned sharply to the left, curving at the foot of a low, grassy bank upon which was a thick grove of oaks. It was a spot Goddin would like, a fair view of river and shore, and it would give Dick an opportunity to watch his back-trail for nearly a league. He paddled to it, landed, and then with infinite care and at the cost of all his strength he lifted Goddin to the grass at the foot of the trees.

"Thank you, Dick," said Antoine when he looked up the long stretch of river. "It is the place I would have chosen. Now if I may have a drink, please. There. Thank you. Now sit down in front of me, Dick, and please do not look as if the end of the world had come. There is no reason why death should be so dreadful."

"Antoine! Antoine!" cried the Virginian. "Don't speak so! You can not die now!"

"You are young, my friend, and youth always has the wrong idea of death. There is no reason why death should not be pleasant. It is for me as I lie here with this view before me, with the smell of Spring in the air and with you beside me. That is one of the things I am most thankful for, that I have known you, and that we have this friendship. It has brought youth to me, Dick, mine own youth back again, and I owe you much."

His eyes closed, his lips moved silently for a moment, and he seemed to be asleep. After a while he began to speak again.

"I am not regretful. I have lived a full life, though I have not accomplished all that I had wished. I have gone through it with open eyes, knowing that this life in the wilderness is filled with danger. But it has been the sauce for the pudding, and those of us who take the risks can not complain when we are caught.

"I will be gone soon, Dick. I can see only a little way up the river, just across to the other shore. I want you to have my license to trade, friend. It is the only thing I can leave. And I will go content that you will make honest use of it, that you will see as I have seen that the fur is only the beginning, that this fair land was not meant for savages who spend their lives in killing and torturing, that there is to come a day when it will be filled with a happy people.

"I know you have the vision, and the true heart, and that you will do your share in the work that is to be done. You may never receive a reward, may even be persecuted for what you do. History may never give you credit, but those are little things. Live so that you may die with a clean heart and the honest conviction that you have done your duty to your fellow-men. That is the sum of life, and I know it will be yours."

Again his eyes closed and he was silent for a long time. Dick feared the end had come and waited in dumb terror. At last the blood-blackened lips moved.

"I am going, Dick," he whispered. "Good-by, friend. I wish you would—no, I will not ask a promise. I know you will go on into this new land. I had hoped to find it for my people, take it in the name of my king. But yours will do as well, for it can never be a king's land but a country of an honest, happy people. Good-by, Dick."

The young Virginian, tears streaming down his face, bent over the hand of his friend and kissed it passionately.

"Antoine! Antoine!" he cried.

The fingers stiffened convulsively in his clasp, blood flowed from the wounded man's lips, and Dick knew that he was alone.

For a time he knelt there beside the body. He had hoped, refused to believe, and now that death had come to this man for whom he had never had anything except love and respect, he was as stunned as though the Ouinibegous' bullet had brought instant oblivion.

Humbly, reverently, he stretched the body out beneath the tree, folded the hands across the chest and stood looking down into the calm, peaceful face.

"It is when we die that we have the only test of bravery," he said aloud. "Life but trains us for it. Here died a man with a heart like those of the knights of old."

The stillness of the bright, sunny Spring noon was suddenly rent by a chorus of whoops and shrill yells. Dick wheeled toward the river to see three canoes, each manned by a half-dozen savages, less than half a league away.

CHAPTER XI

THE VISION

WITH his heart empty, in the deep, black despondency of youth, Dick's first thought was to remain where he was, to stand above the body of his friend and avenge him before he himself at last fell beside it. He need not wait long. In a few minutes all would be over.

But a remembrance of savage methods of which he had heard quickened him to action. It would be sacrilege to leave what remained of his friend to be the plaything of their inhuman passions, to permit that strong, brave face to be mutilated even in death. He stooped, grasped the body about the waist and staggered down to the canoe with it. He dropped it on to the blood-soaked blankets, for every second was precious, and shoved off. A few strokes took him around the bend but not out of hearing of the yells of rage that echoed up and down the river.

As grimly as twenty-four hours before, Dick settled to his task. With a lead of less than half a league not a stroke must be missed. His own canoe was fast, one Goddin had ordered made according to his own design, but it was heavily loaded and driven by only one paddle. The pursuing canoes were larger, slower, but propelled by half a dozen blades each, and the swift current would play no favorites.

The one factor in Dick's favor, the one which probably had given him the last uninterrupted moments with Antoine, was the fact that the Ouinibegous would be delayed by the fear that he would hide behind some island or turn up a forest-hidden tributary. Around one of the quick bends it would be easy for him to go ashore, hide himself and the canoe, and watch them pass.

But this would only serve to put his enemies between him and ultimate safety, while there was always the danger that a sharp eye would catch a glimpse of sign on the wet shore. For the present at least his best course lay in keeping as far ahead as possible and he drove on, always in the swiftest part of the current, never overlooking any position that would add to his speed.

He was weary, sore, losing strength, but, like a true racer, he ascribed greater weariness and debility to his adversaries, while his will spurred muscles that shrieked their agony but submitted.

An hour went by. The river twisted and turned and not once did Dick catch sight of the savages. Mid-afternoon came and for the first time he thought of the portage into the river of the Mascoutens, the only route to Lac Mecheygan and a land in which he could find white men. He began to watch the banks but nothing was familiar. He had come up with Goddin when the water was low at the end of a dry Summer. Now the Ouisconsin was beginning to overflow its banks and it was not at all like the stream on which he had embarked the day before.

More perplexing than all else, his general course was different. Early in the day he had traveled in a southeasterly direction. Now the declining sun was to the left of the bow. It could mean only that he was traveling toward the southwest, away from Lac Mecheygan.

Dick, however, still hoped for the portage, still watched the left bank for signs of the carrying-place, but he dared not stop for a careful search. So long as he could lift a paddle he must keep on with the current. If he had missed the portage it was a hazard of the game all forest-rangers must expect.

Before sunset there was no longer any doubt in his mind that he had passed it. The character of the country had changed. Pines had given way to oak, maple, linden, elms, aspens and, along the shores, willows in thick hedges. High bluffs now bordered the valley, which was from one to two leagues wide, and the river three or four times as big as where he had begun his journey seemed to wander about the great bottom lands as if seeking a better channel.

The flood was not at its height for the sandbars which formed the banks were still dry. Dick could see evidences of how the river sometimes had taken the entire valley for its bed. Now it turned and twisted, dashed from the high bluffs on one side to those on the other, only to be turned again by the great hills.

The river, too, was now thickly strewn with islands. Sometimes they were bare, white stretches of sand. Again they were small, thin strips of higher ground upon which great trees were growing. Always the river gnawed at their sides and undermined trees hung far out over the current. Often the islands stretched for a league or two in a long line, connected by rows of willows the tops of which waved in the current. Two channels then resulted, each a river in itself.

In the evening the stream straightened out for more than a league and was comparatively free of islands. At the lower end Dick laid aside his paddle and looked back. As the canoe was whirled on by the swift current he watched the far end of the straight stretch. Now, if ever, the pursuing canoes would be seen. But at last he swung around the bend without a sight of them.

In the evening chill his muscles had stiffened in the short rest and when again he took up his paddle it was only to torture himself. Every muscle, every nerve, his numbed brain, cried for rest. His eyes ached. He was too near exhaustion even to realize that he was hungry.

The canoe swung straight on in the center of the swiftest part, sometimes stern first, sometimes broadside to the current. He was traveling without effort and darkness would come soon. He stretched himself out in the bottom and instantly was asleep.

Dick was wakened by the sudden stopping of the canoe and a swirling of water against its side. Dazed, stiff, his brain as cramped as his body, he lifted himself and looked around. The sun was high. The canoe had come to rest on the end of a sandbar opposite the base of a bluff which towered nearly four hundred feet above the stream and against which the river dashed furiously, only to be swung out again into the center of the broad valley.

On the sandbar was dry driftwood and Dick crawled out and started a fire. There was a long stretch of water behind him, but so far as he could see he was alone. Birds sang, a fish sometimes flipped above the surface, but otherwise there was no movement, no sound of life. He cooked breakfast and, his strength and alertness revived, immediately cursed himself for his folly in so exposing himself to the pursuing Ouinibegous. He shoved off and began to paddle as swiftly as the day before.

WHEN nightfall came again Dick began to believe that he was no longer followed. The savages had not suspected his going down the Ouisconsin past the portage. They were probably seeking for him there, believing that he had turned aside before he reached it or had attempted to paddle through to the river that led to Lac Mecheygan. All day he had made his two leagues an hour, had passed through a country as beautiful as any he had ever seen, and yet there had been no sign of human habitation.

He and Goddin had often talked with the Ouinibegous during the Winter in an effort to learn something of the "great water." that lay to the westward. But no member of the tribe had ever been to it, though they believed that it was only a few days' paddle down the Ouisconsin. It was a great water, they said. On its shores strange, fierce nations dwelt, and beneath its surface were great monsters that swallowed whole canoes and all that was in them at a gulp. None of their people had ever dared venture so far. They would not risk it now.

In the darkness Dick again abandoned himself to the current and stretched out in the bottom of the canoe. When morning came he found that some miracle had kept him off the sandbars all night, and he was still drifting, now straight west, in the same cliff-bound valley. With his breakfast came confidence that he need no longer fear pursuit and for the first time he gave thought to the problem that now confronted him. The body beneath the blanket in the bow must be buried. This necessity redoubled his loneliness and his sense of loss, but it also brought an idea. He set the canoe afloat and began to paddle.

Now with the bluffs towering above him on the right, now swinging at the base of a high cliff on the left, turning from side to side of the broad valley, Dick kept on with the current. The river had become a great noble stream, as beautiful as any he had ever seen. He had gone so far to the south since the murder of Goddin he found the leaves budding, the land green with the vividness of Spring. The little islands, with which the channel was dotted, lay like huge emeralds before him. The towering bluffs had entirely lost their ruggedness beneath their new cloaks of verdure. The valley was a broad prairie studded with clumps of oaks.

At noon the hills came close to the water on either side, and then the river swung around a bend and straightened out into a long expanse which broadened at the far end beneath a line of high hills. For two leagues the water was unbroken except for a few small islands directly in front. On the left a long ridge rose nearly four hundred feet above him, and on the right low, oak-covered hills gave way to a broad prairie.

For a moment the sheer beauty and grandeur of the scene held Dick breathless.

"Not even the river that flows into the sea at New Amsterdam excels it!" he whispered.

And then the significence of what he saw impelled itself and he knew that even then his speeding canoe was at the mouth of the Ouisconsin, that he, the first of white men, was looking upon the "great water," the upper reaches of the Misisepe.

Dazed by the magnificence of this wonderful confluence of the two waters, Dick sat motionless, only unconsciously keeping the canoe headed with the current. The force of the water swept him on past the islands and then the view opened before him to the north and south. For leagues in either direction he could see the great river. To the south it was broad, unbroken, stretching from bluff to bluff. To the north it widened, the channel studded by many islands, washing at the base of the hills on the west and at the edge of a prairie on the east. Not until its strong, quiet, sweeping current caught and whirled him away to the south did Dick begin to paddle.

Straight on toward the west he went, where a mountain towered above the water. The current became swifter, not the bubbling, swirling, twisting water he had known in the Ouisconsin, but a silent, powerful drift, a force entirely in accord with the majesty of such a stream.

Swept down, fighting steadily, at last catching a huge eddy, Dick finally reached the base of the mountain on the western side and beached his canoe. Immediately above him, twenty feet higher than the water, directly facing the entrance of the Ouisconsin and commanding a broad sweep of the great river itself, was the bare crown of a knoll.

He set to work at once. With his ax he made a rough spade with which to dig a shallow grave in the rocky soil. He was forced to cut out a thwart in the canoe to remove the body of Goddin, but he reached the knoll with it and laid it in the slight depression. Over it he built up a tomb of stones as high as his shoulders. Then he hewed from a dry driftwood log a plank in which he burned deeply with the heated end of his ramrod this inscription:

ANTOINE GODDIN
He Served His People

"Oh, Antoine!" cried Dick as he stepped back and looked at the result of his work: "If you could only know! But you must know! You must know that you lie in the land you sought, beyond the 'great water.'"

In the spell of the emotion which gripped him Dick stood for a time beside the tomb of his friend. In the first moments he was overpowered by a sense of loneliness. On the Ouisconsin there had always been the fear of being overtaken by the Ouinibegous. Now he seemed to realize for the first time that he was more completely, more utterly alone than man had ever been before.

In that moment there was no room for thought of the glory of his achievement. If there were gladness it was only because he had been able to lay the body of his friend on the shore of the "great water" that he had desired so in life, that beside it he might peacefully sleep away the ages and watch perhaps the coming of the people for whom he had planned and hoped.

Loneliness and grief Dick suffered too, but somehow it was no longer the former unreconciled bitterness. In its place had come a quiet, sorrowful acceptance of the fact that he must say good-by to the only man he had ever really loved and travel alone on the "great water," hundreds of leagues from the nearest of his race, completely surrounded by thousands and thousands of savages.

GRADUALLY, despite his grief and his loneliness, the one great thought impressed itself. He, the first of the white race, had found that for which men had toiled and hoped through a century. He, of the colony of Virginia, in one short year had done what the French had sought to do for scores of years. He had been driven to it, had reached the river when fleeing from certain death at the hands of savages. But nothing could detract from the indisputable fact that he was there, that he had found the "great water," that to him had come the distinction of being first.

He looked up and down the broad reaches of the stream, across to the Ouisconsin, up to the towering cliffs and bluffs. Never, he thought, had he looked upon a grander a more imposing, scene. Except that he knew he was far to the west of Lac Mecheygan, he had no knowledge of the country in which he found himself. What this Misisepe was, whence it came, where it finally reached the sea, he could not even guess. Where he stood it flowed straight south bending slightly toward the east. But for all he could tell it might swerve off to the west and the Gulf of California, or to the east and the coast of the Western ocean south of Virginia.

Behind him was a deep ravine that seemed to offer an opportunity to scale the bluff and see more of the beautiful land that lay about him, and impulsively he started toward it.

Deep into the heart of the hills he went, his path darkened by great maples and elms and oaks. A tiny stream trickled over rocks and under moss, and as the ravine narrowed he was forced back and forth across it, sometimes straight up its bed. Suddenly he was confronted by cliffs that rose straight up past the tops of the tallest trees. The water had cut and worn them, and the rough surface was brilliant with alternate strata of many colors.

Still following the bed of the stream, Dick came at last to a pool at the base of a cliff. From the top the water fell in a broad, thin sheet. As he looked up he saw that his only course lay behind the waterfall. A ledge offered slippery footing and he passed back of the cascade, around the edge of the falls and up into a broader ravine.

Here he turned to the left up a steep slope clothed with oaks and at last, pushing through a fringe of brush, came out with startling suddenness upon the point of the bluff.

Dick could not repress an exclamation

of amazement. Far to the north and the south stretched the great river. Its width was a measure of the mighty valley of which it was the center. The glint of the sun from its surface was only a flash of the brightness of a vast land. The hazy distance enshrouded its coming and going and yet invited pleasant journeying into the mystery beyond.

The river itself held a peculiar power in its vastness, its silent, majestic, incontestable might. There was no hurry, no turmoil. Calm, dignified, peaceful, it lay there, the great artery through which flowed the life of the world's wonderland.

Directly opposite Dick opened the mouth of the Ouisconsin, most beautiful of waterways. As far as he could see in either direction steep, rounded, heavily-wooded bluffs hemmed in the Misisepe on the west. To the east and north lay a broad, green plain which, to Dick, could have been intended by the Maker only for the nurture of a coming race. The whole land, in fact, seemed dormant, expectant, lying ready.

"What an empire!" cried the Virginian aloud. "Nothing could be more fair than this. It is as Antoine said, the land for a strong, happy race of people. If only he might have lived to see it!"

The mention of his friend's name brought a realization of what his friend had longed for, what he had planned and worked for, what had been so cruelly denied him, and what had now been given to one who had not even striven for it.

The thought brought a sense of humility and of responsibility. Not when he had revolted at the rape of the Islinois, not when he had avenged the death of Antoine Goddin, not when he had knelt beside his dying friend, did Dick Jeffreys emerge from the chrysalis of youth. It remained for this knowledge that he had found a new land, the land of which Antoine Goddin had dreamed, to stiffen the fibers of his soul, to bring him face to face with responsibility and duty.

For a time Dick stood there, dizzy with the idea, failing to grasp anything more than the present. Then Antoine's dying words returned to him, and the thought and the trust behind them.

"The fur is only the beginning. This fair land was not meant for savages who spend their lives in killing and torturing. I know that you will have the vision, that you will do your share. You will have done your duty to your fellow-men. No, I will not ask a promise. Your king will do as well, for it can never be a king's land, but a land of honest, happy people."

"Not for your sake, Antoine," he said aloud. "Not for the sake of any man. You said once that a king is only a symbol to you, a symbol of that which holds a people together. You were right, my friend. You were honest and brave, and you had the vision. I can do no better than follow."

He walked forward to the very edge of the cliff and there, silhouetted against the April sky, high above the mighty river, he cried in a loud voice:

"In the name of the people of England and through their king, Charles the Second, I claim this land."

He turned, chose a giant oak several paces behind him, and began to hew away one side. When he had a broad, flat surface he built a fire, heated his ramrod and burned into the wood the words he had cried to the heavens a few minutes before.

With some difficulty he counted the days since Antoine had been shot and thereby arrived at the date. Beneath his inscription he burned:

April 17, 1673

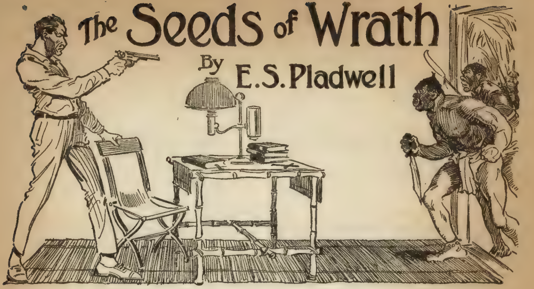
Dick did not even dream that two months later to the day two canoes would appear between the islands far up the Ouisconsin and that, as he had done a few hours before, Louis Joliet, representative of the French king, and Jacques Marquette, Jesuit, with five French voyageurs, would sweep out into the current of the Misisepe.

Dick's thoughts were elsewhere. Before him lay six or seven hundred leagues of wilderness, thousands upon thousands of savages, hunger and toil and privation, possibly torture and death, and, at the end of it all, Sir William Berkeley with his hatred and his noose.

He did not falter for an instant. His face was stern, his eyes steady and bright with a new zeal. He turned swiftly down the side of the bluff with a glad shout—

"Back to Virginia!"

TO BE CONCLUDED



The Seeds of Wrath

By E. S. Pladwell

Author of "No Brains," "On Short Allowance," etc.

IT WAS not the sacrilege alone that made the Reverend John McTodd arise with sudden red rage when Imbi tossed the gilded crucifix off the home-made bamboo table in the lamp-lit bungalow and grinned impudently. It was the calm insolence of the half-naked savage that seemed with one stroke to rub in six months of sneering effrontery from all his evil tribe.

McTodd came to partial sanity to find the leg of a shattered Chinese bench in his hand and himself bending over a prostrate Imbi whose brownish face was running red. To his own surprise the missionary found himself not thinking in Christian horror of his attack on a fellow-man but seeming to listen, as if in a sardonic trance, to words spoken months before by the portly, round-faced secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions who sent him to this fiendish island.

"Use tact, gentleness, kindness," instructed the well-groomed and fatherly secretary in his comfortable New York office. "The work is dangerous and I honor you for having chosen it. These people are real savages. You must win their friendship by ignoring minor irritations and making them look up to you for moral and spiritual guidance. We look to you for results in keeping with your education, enterprise and magnificent physical condition. Remember, above all, stick to those three things: tact, gentleness, kindness!"

"Tact!" snarled McTodd as the brown form of Imbi began to writhe into consciousness. "I'll tact you! Let's see where I've started."

The missionary lifted the wobbling head in a mighty arm and examined his handiwork closer.

"Scalp wound," he muttered. "Lucky I didn't kill him!"

There was still no churchly regret in the Reverend John McTodd. The softening ties of the divinity school seemed to have burst at one sudden explosion and made him again the university man who had mopped up whole football teams by his own herculean strength and mad determination. He splashed a rag in a bucket of water and swabbed the tribesman's matted forehead unemotionally until a realization of his own position began to seep into his brain and bring him up standing. The youth he struck was the son of a chieftain.

"I'm done!" nodded the missionary as he stared at his black shadow on the matted wall. "Oh, well!" He shrugged his shoulders. "It might as well come now. I'm sick of it all—sick of it!" And then he gasped in a lightning-flash of self-discovery. "I'm talking to myself!" he yelled, clenching hairy hands till the nails bit into his palms. "I've come to that! I'm talking to myself!"

Six months of loneliness, futility and sunheat had done it. Three months of self-searching because of his failures had made it worse. Filled with high ideals and higher hopes he had come to this smelly green-and-yellow island, a smooth-shaven, blue-eyed blond giant among coffee-colored pigmies. He wanted to be friends.

He had prayed for these people, smiled upon them, played with their babes, tried to insinuate the Word into their intellect; but they only passed from curiosity to aloofness and then to grinning mockery until their monkey-like boycott had almost driven him rabid. He, a man educated to heights they never dreamed of, was a pariah among them and a mark for contempt!

Had he known what the chieftain had said about him in solemn, brush-lit council in a grove of palms, he might have understood more.

"The man is a fool," said fat old Makosa in his native dialect while the firelight glistened on the knives of his warriors. "He has the stature of a mighty warrior. He talks of a God that does not appear, and sings woman-songs, and plays with children. Therefore his wits are gone."

It was not a simple matter of eliminating the Reverend John McTodd off-hand. That was tried on a previous white man but some queer devil-boat appeared soon thereafter and hurled lyddite and guncotton through village and palm-grove till trees, huts and islanders were blown into one mass of spattered ruin. Since then the tribe was less able to meet invading warriors. Makosa never forgot the lesson.

The incident was known to McTodd but his own attack on a native placed him in a different situation; but something was stirring his pulses strangely and he let it grip him harder as he noted that Imbi was looking at him steadily, without sign of emotion, like a silent reptile biding its time.

"Get out!" snapped McTodd, pointing with the bench-leg toward the veranda.

Imbi's head went down like a whipped dog's and he limped along queerly on all fours, shuffling his knees at every move and throwing grotesque shadows from the lamplight. He turned the corner of the door and vanished, leaving a sinister red trail along the matting, like a portent of things to come. McTodd's lips tightened.

"It's war," he nodded. "It's me against 'em all. Well, so be it. I'm ready!"

A GREAT load seemed to fall from his shoulders. No longer did he have to meet these creatures with gentleness, seek their friendship, turn the other cheek. He knew now that he loathed the whole dirty tribe and owned a majestic white man's contempt for them that he never suspected before. He had not been a hypocrite. He had striven mightily and lashed his own soul when he failed. He had prayed for guidance night after night, seeking aid for his lonely heart while tom-toms beat for orgy-dances on the beach below.

At first when he looked up toward the glaring tropic stars for comfort he thought his prayers brought him surcease; yet lately those prayers had only rung in his ears like hollow noises. But now it was different.

A hundred generations of warrior-clansmen forefathers were whispering strange things to his soul, making his blood thrill with pagan thoughts that had nothing to do with church or creed. He half-realized he was running amuck, but though his flinty Scotch conscience railed at him it only made him worse through defiance of it. He had crossed his Rubicon and thrown aside his cross.

"I'm a Christian no longer," he muttered, "and I might as well make a good job of it."

McTodd's glance fell on a little black prayer-book with gilded edges on the green cloth under his reading-lamp. He picked it up and tossed it far out of the door, smiling grimly while it rustled through the brush. The crucifix on the floor next caught his attention. It was given him by a Catholic priest who wished him well. The crucifix was just about to follow the prayer-book when McTodd stopped himself. His action was too much like Imbi's. Instead, he placed the gleaming thing on the table carefully.

"I have deserted my God," he ruminated, "but I'm not a savage—yet!"

On the table was a letter on dainty blue stationery, now soiled by much thumbing. It had come to him in Manila when he first started for this island and even more than the prayer-book it had been his comfort. The gracious daughter of the secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions had written it and shown her faith and affection in every word. He knew it by heart.

"I know you will come back in triumph because you can not fail," it said. "You will win the hearts of these people as you won mine, because of yourself and because you will treat them in a way they can understand."

There were to have been golden days after McTodd made good on the island and won his way to promotion. That had been thoroughly understood.

McTodd smiled tiredly. The letter had taken him through many a trouble and put heart into him; but now it was like a thing from some past age, still sacred because of its memories, but without influence.

"I can not fail!" he laughed, while the walls echoed the sound weirdly. "Win the hearts of these people? Huh—I'll win 'em if they get within range!"

Acting on that idea, McTodd went to a trunk in his bedroom and dug out a fine Navy revolver. It worked perfectly and the cartridges fitted, and that was all the man cared to know just then.

It was the calm before the storm and the lonely man sensed it as he walked to the veranda and took a look about. Above, the stars shone with tropic boldness. To his right, beyond the fronds of a big palm tree, the dim firelights of a hut village flickered. To his left a black mountain sloped upward to a grim crater silent for many decades. Ahead, below the cliff on which the bungalow stood, the Pacific pounded on the reefs and bellowed its thundering sea-song, or showed its phosphorescent breakers on the beach below the village. Into McTodd's nostrils came sweetish, dampish smells from foliage too thick for its acreage. Into his strained ears came no human sound.

For ten minutes the big tow-headed Scotsman in white drill stood like a sentinel, and then came the pattering of feet on the gravel below the bungalow. The natives were coming. McTodd stepped into the house, sat down, picked up a book, and pretended to read. He found his heart beating strangely but his nerves steady as a rock, and he only looked up again when eight brownish figures had crowded through the doorway and the lamplight glittered on the steel of their big, cruel knives.

It was a motley delegation of undersized half-humans. Baleful head-hunter eyes stared from under matted mops of black hair. Rainbow-colored loin-cloths—blue, green, yellow, red—flashed fantastically with every move of queerly-shaped bodies and thin, bent legs. The leader had the greenest cloth of all, the biggest knife, the thinnest, cruelest face. It was Taafa, sub-chief and prime-devil, now frankly angry.

"What for you bang Imbi?" he demaded, in an outburst of trader's English.

"Because Imbi was fresh," returned the white man, equally frank.

The word was new to Taafa.

"Fraish?" he snarled. "What fraish?"

The devil within McTodd made him show his disdain for the sub-chief.

"That is none of your business," he replied, quite evenly.

The words were not understood but the inflection was. Eight hands went to sword-hilts. Seven stayed there, but the great blade of Taafa flashed out with a sweep of his scrawny arm.

"What for you bang Imbi?" he roared again. Then he stuttered. "You—you go away —— quick!" He pointed with the sword toward the ocean and continents beyond. "You go—go—go!" he screamed. You go other place quick. You no go——"

He flexed his wrist and made the sword sing through the air.

"So!" returned McTodd, coolly. "That means I'm invited to leave the island. Well, you leave the bungalow. You savvy? You go—go—git!"

And he arose to full height and pointed toward the door. He had stood six months of insult and now he was through for good.

INCREDULITY and amazement showed for an instant on the scarred face of the savage and then he let his natural impulses flow, forgetting the lesson of the bombardment, forgetting everything.

"Yah!" he shrieked, brandishing his sword and advancing on McTodd ferociously while the others yelled and prepared for action.

The temper of the savages was up. So was McTodd's. The air was electric. It was war.

The missionary took a step backward when the sharp blade cut the air toward him and then he went mad—violent, Berserk mad. He crashed a mighty sledge-hammer fist with all his strength into Taafa's face. The sub-chief went limp and slumped to the floor while the other screaming islanders came on with their knives. McTodd whipped out the pistol. He fired into the thick of them while the bungalow rocked with the thunder.

One came under the weapon, got brushed aside by a frantic elbow, and slipped up behind him, grinning evilly. The white man whirled and smashed the screaming savage through the flimsy wall. The bungalow stood on a rock alongside a ravine.

An agile figure dodged up to McTodd as he turned again. The point of a knife just touched his ribs. The maddened Scotsman struck with the pistol-butt in his fingers and the native dropped silently.

Clear for an instant, McTodd leveled the pistol and pulled the trigger fast. The first wild shot missed a figure jumping toward him. The next did not. Neither did the other three. The place was filled with acrid smoke, spitting flame, shrieking, dancing fighters and the roar of powder-explosions until at last when the white man pulled trigger only an empty click resulted.

With one forearm the panting, sweating McTodd brushed away the perspiration trickling into his eyes and his sight took quick account of the scene. Only one brownish figure faced him, a poisonous little reptile with curved knife in hand, hesitating whether to attack or run. The blond giant grimly reversed the pistol in his hand and started with the butt to finish the job, stepping over dark figures that were either still or quivering. The last native gave a yell of terror and vanished.

"That means more are coming," panted McTodd, unsteadily.

The conqueror looked about the room. It was a wreck. His chairs were splintered, the pictures on the wall had crashed down, his desk was overturned, the side-wall toward the ravine was half-gone, and on the floor brown figures with green and yellow and red loin-cloths were huddled queerly, their knives glinting on the reddish matting between them. Taafa, the sub-chief, had come to consciousness and was starting to rise; but when he saw the Scotsman's gaze upon him he played dead quickly.

McTodd allowed himself a bitter smile. His brain was working fast.

"A hostage!" he murmured, thickly. "A loaf of bread, a box of cartridges, and thou—until some boat arrives!"

The white giant strode to Taafa, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck as he would a snarling dog, dodged a snapping attempt to bite, swung him to his legs, rushed him into the bedroom, and tied his hands and feet with a rope. After that the pistol was reloaded and the missionary sat on the bed to get his breath and consider his next move while Taafa writhed around the floor.

The white man's absent-minded glance roved to the front room where the huddled brown figures were lying under the garish light from a lamp that still burned. As if seeing the sight for the first time McTodd stiffened and gasped, then buried his face in trembling, remorseful hands.

"And I came here to preach peace and good will!" he sobbed, brokenly.

The reaction had set in. He began to tremble. The pit of his stomach seemed gone. He felt alone—terribly, frightfully alone, like a child sweating from a bad dream and peering into the darkness. The fronds of the palms murmured in the wind outside and he jumped from sheer cat-nervousness, then looked out of a window toward the quiet stars, finding no comfort because blood-guilt was on his conscience and he and his God had parted company. He shivered as with a chill.

And then McTodd noted the vicious face of Taafa leering below him and his fighting spirit returned. Hatred called to hatred, louder than the call of conscience or softening influences. The snarling little devil seemed to typify all the bitter humiliations and defeats the white man had suffered and McTodd longed to throttle him; but Taafa was too valuable as a hostage.

That brought up the question of McTodd's immediate future. Should he hide in the brush with Taafa and dodge from thicket to thicket, a mark for any spear while he slept, or should he face the whole crowd where he was and bargain with them, beat them, or go down like a white man?

His jaw set, McTodd decided to stay to the finish, even though the native who fled had already spread the alarm through village and palm-grove.

THE fleeing one had come upon old Makosa squatting in front of his hut and chatting with two of his confrères. The runner burst upon them in great excitement and haste, neglecting to mention that he had taken time to cut himself so as to show honorable wounds of mortal combat.

"The white man has gone quite mad!" panted the wide-eyed bearer of tidings. "Seven are gone and I alone stood him off until my wounds drained my strength. He is quite mad!"

The old chief's nut-brown face skewered into many wrinkles and he scratched the dazzling white wool of his head while tribesmen came running to hear the tale-bearer's story, embellished with finer detail as the crowd augmented and ending with a frenzy of words. When it was all over Makosa arose slowly and counted noses.

"You have heard. What shall be done?" he asked.

Cruel faces snarled monkey-like; savage-looking knives were fondled and voices chattered shrilly in the crowd that swirled about the fat-stomached, spindle-shanked old chieftain.

"Here!" snarled a warrior, stretching out a curved blade. "Are we children, to stand here talking? What are these for?"

"And have another devil-boat throw ruin into us?" reminded Makosa.

The crafty old chieftain was thinking hard. Leaving aside the terrible lesson given two years before by a big cruiser with a most demoniac battery, Makosa saw the big blond white missionary as a State problem in himself. Seven men were gone—seven warriors from a thinned community which already had trouble to ward off raiders who came annually.

From a high hill on a clear day Makosa could look across the Pacific's sunlit waters and see the faint blue mountain-tops of Chandapan, whose people had never been bombarded and—who owned annoying war-canoes. To Makosa seven fighters meant something—and the blond white giant still had that pistol.

"But the man is mad—mad—mad!" chattered the runner, still haranguing public opinion.

"Enough!" roared Makosa. "He is not mad! He is come to sanity! Look you. His mind has been the mind of a witless child and his body the body of a mighty warrior. He sang for women and played with children. He spoke of a Gospel advising meekness before all enemies, being quite demented. But now his brain is cleared. He thinks of women and children and meekness no longer. He is come to sanity. He is a warrior. I shall see him."

And thereupon the chieftain did so.

The scene at the interview was as formal as a meeting of Mandarins, colorful as a vivid picture by some splashy impressionist, grim as the slumbering old volcano that towered above the lamplit bungalow. Makosa, in State regalia, consisting of a sword, two daggers and a purple-and-yellow sash, waddled through the bungalow door, followed by his choicest warriors, with the spear-carrying populace massed behind him.

Further inside the room the cold-eyed McTodd faced them stiffly, holding the blue-steel pistol ready in his right hand and keeping the bound and mutilated Taafa before him as an exhibit and a hostage. The lamplight gleamed impartially on white steel and blue steel that seemed to shimmer with the electricity in the air.

When workmen had cleared away the huddled heap of lost warriors, the grunting Makosa squatted on the matting like some distorted Buddha come to give judgment. The rest of the warriors did likewise and, seeing it was not war but palaver, McTodd warily seated himself on the arm of a battered chair, wondering what was coming next.

In trade-English Makosa opened with accusations concerning Imbi and seven warriors. McTodd responded with counter-accusations, throwing in frank opinions of the whole tribe, starting with Makosa and working down. Brown forms behind the chieftain began to sway restlessly like long grass in a breeze; but Makosa held out a commanding hand and the murmuring subsided.

Then the chieftain began to talk in earnest, picking words slowly from his small vocabulary; and as he went along the white man's face showed alternate amazement, calculation, wariness and relief. It was a cold proposition to unfold to a missionary who came to preach a Gospel of gentleness but it brought a glint of hope to his eyes for at least it offered a way out—if it were sincere.

"You—you mean you want me to join your warriors?" blurted the dazed white man after Makosa had finished.

The old chief nodded affirmatively and McTodd's eyes narrowed.

"It may be treachery and it may be true," he muttered. "It's worth considering."

His searching, level glance met Makosa's and he found it hard to conceal his loathing of the dirty little fat savage, but he did it by laughing mirthlessly.

"And I was a Christian missionary! Oh, well, I've almost gone the whole distance now—what's the difference?" He nodded to the chieftain. "All right. I'll take you up, but I'll be the boss. Understand? There's going to be discipline!" He relapsed into trade-English, pointing a finger: "White man say you do, you do; you no do, white man shoot!"

Makosa caught the general idea and nodded grave approval, for the wily old chieftain estimated this six-foot-three white-skin to be a most desirable ally. Thus the palaver was concluded; after which Makosa arose and blandly started to waddle toward Taafa. Thinking fast, the white man decided to let the sneering little devil go, so he stood aside, while the general populace started to file out.

Severing Taafa's cords Makosa started to leave also, but his eye caught the gleaming crucifix on the table. Half-forgetting McTodd, he began to edge toward it. When he got in front of the table he turned as if to look toward Taafa but his left hand was behind him.

"Drop that!" snarled McTodd, jumping toward him. "Here, you dirty little thief—let go of that!"

He wrenched the crucifix out of the chief's hand while warriors in the doorway turned and stood irresolutely. McTodd found his anger seething up again.

"I've a notion to ram it down your throat!" he roared into the livid face of old Makosa.

Then another thought struck him.

"No—here, you take it!" he thundered. "You'll keep it now and every day I'll demand an accounting! It will keep you out of mischief. I hereby appoint you the Grand Chief Bearer of Loot. Now go—git!" And he pointed toward the doorway.

The old chief grabbed the glittering thing thrust into his hand and fairly flew out of the door, knocking aside swordsmen coming to his rescue, who stood uncertainly for a moment before following him for council. When they had gone clamoring down the hill the big white man stood alone in his battered living-room, his temper sagging away again.

"And I have fallen even to this sacrilege!" he murmured, bowing his head. "Well, so be it." He straightened again and his mouth set in a grim line. "I am no better than my fellow-savages—as is proper. And now that I've started I'll make 'em better warriors, dead or alive!"

FILLED with this aggressive resolution McTodd strode to the village next morning, still half expecting to be surrounded and killed but prepared for anything. Dirty brown warriors gave him strange, half-awed and half-hateful looks, but none molested him even though he walked into the hut of the chief.

"Get your gang together!" ordered McTodd, pointing to a cleared field. The white man seemed like a person possessed of the demon of energy so old Makosa nodded and ordered his crowd to work, not without first accounting for that crucifix.

"Now we'll have some drilling," announced McTodd to the spearmen who straggled out past him. "It's long since I was in the university cadets but you won't know the difference anyhow. Hey, you—turn around—go other way!"

He grabbed a warrior and shoved him toward the field briskly. Subconsciously he was glorying in his unhallowed leadership. He had been a pariah here. This was different.

Sorting out his wondering savages by stature, separating swordsmen from spearmen, the white giant finally managed to aline his dubious rabble of brown nondescripts and teach them elemental commands in terse English. At first the crowd gave interest and squirmed through easy evolutions because it was novel, but within an hour the ranks began to sag and indifference took place of obedience.

Then McTodd commenced to assert his discipline with calculated audacity.

The first savage who fell out of line was cuffed and shoved back. The second was kicked and straightened up. The third was knocked down instantly and scowls began to meet the white man from every side, but he did not care now. He meant to overcome them right at the start. Once after two hours of it they started for him but the ready pistol-muzzle came forth and they fell back.

McTodd knew he was arrogant, over-bearing, even brutal, but the memory of those six months of purgatory was with him always. He would either master these half-humans or go down shooting. For a time it looked as if he were going down. He felt like a lion-tamer, able to face these wild creatures but loath to turn his back.

Then Makosa arrived, still clutching that gilded crucifix. McTodd gave him public obeisance and led him to the front rank and made him stand there. The queer old man in the purple-and-yellow breech-cloth, holding that gleaming thing, became the center of all attention. McTodd noted the change and smiled mirthlessly. He was learning. A chieftain holding an emblem in the front rank means something the world over. McTodd kept him there for good and through this miracle the first day passed and the white giant had gone far toward establishing mastery.

Seven days the implacable Scotsman drilled the natives with the aid of tongue, fist and pistol, and by the eighth they could swing by him in solid ranks, answering to his iron discipline. Some had given trouble but these were knocked to the ground relentlessly; and somehow, in place of black looks, McTodd noted he was getting more willing obedience. After that it was easier. He had them under control.

It was a different McTodd now. He had become a bearded, coatless athlete with the terse manners of a truckman and the barking voice of a drill-sergeant. He was no longer the gentle churchman; he never expected to be one again; but at least he was now a master and intended to remain so until a trading-schooner came to take him away.

On the ninth day the natives felt impelled to start a weird, rhythmic chant that ran from rank to rank as they marched until it swelled to the full four hundred voices. McTodd stood the ghoulish noise as long as he could, then—

"Stop that!" he barked.

Slowly the crooning died away and questioning eyes turned toward the white man and made him embarrassed. Though that noise gave him the creeps it was not policy to stop the natural chanting of marching men.

"Here!" he yelled after an awkward pause. "If you must sing, learn music!" His mind cast about for something, but he knew little except the tunes of the clergy.

"All right," he shouted, recklessly, "sing this:

> Onward, Christian soldiers,
> Marching as to war,
> With the Cross——"

The sacrilege seemed to stick in his Scotch throat but he shrugged his shoulders. It was no worse than the rest of this business so McTodd finished in a roaring voice that seemed to have defiance in it; and gradually, little by little, the mass of brown figures took it up imitatively as the white man chanted it over and over again.

THEY sang it when the men of Chandapan came in war-canoes one morning, ready to sweep all before them. McTodd's spearmen sang it when they charged in a solid, disciplined phalanx as the invaders swarmed to the beach and the white man's pistol spat into them. McTodd's swordsmen sang it when they grappled at close quarters. His bowmen did not sing at first because they were cleverly concealed by squads in ambush, but later all joined in the chorus while six big upturned war-canoes floated dolefully up to the sands; and still later they roared it in mad celebration while the white man tried to sleep in his bungalow and wondered how soon a sail would appear.

He was master and arbiter of the island and yet he was strangely uncomfortable, for at night his searching Scotch conscience asked him questions that he could not answer except by defiance.

He had come a Christian and a gentleman. He would leave as a hard-hitting, reckless, masterful, brutal adventurer, unfit to mingle with Christians because his Christianity was a frail thing that fell away like a thin coat of shellac when his mighty muscles obeyed a pagan temper. Thus he reasoned during the long nights when that conscience made him squirm to its merciless lash.

In the old times he had winced from humiliation when the sun was up but slept like a child when night came. Now by day he bullied and domineered like a man who did not care, and at night he writhed. As the weeks lengthened into months he found his alternate arrogance and self-abasement worse until the nights became a terror and to keep his mind occupied he stayed as late as possible around the village-fires of his people, holding arbitrary inspections concerning personal cleanliness, listening to their cases at law, giving irrevocable judgments, doling out medicines for their ills, and teaching them to chant the sacred songs he knew while he beat time ironically on a goat-skin drum.

And at last a sail appeared.

Relieved and yet more scared because it brought to a focus the problem of his future, the white giant, with a lump in his throat, watched the thing grow from a tiny speck on the horizon to a good-sized auxiliary schooner that cast anchor off the beach and lowered a boat. But before the schooner had come within two miles of shore McTodd had shaved, donned decent clothes, and even composed himself for the first step toward the inevitable confession of his ghastly failure.

He managed to pull himself together and start toward his crisis manfully, but when he returned among his dusky minions on the beach he rubbed his eyes at what he saw, and trembled as if with palsy.

That lissome, white-clad figure alongside the portly man in the boat, calling and waving to him—where had he seen it before? He passed a hand over his muddled head and pieced the matter out slowly from a flood of memories. It had lived as his dark-eyed queen in a castle-of-dreams, among roses and geraniums and shady nooks and sunlit meadows in some distant rainbow-land where gentle beings with fair skins held human companionship and rarely knocked each other down. It did not belong on this ferocious island. The thing was incongruous—like a white fairy wandering into hell.

McTodd pinched himself to see if he were awake, but he was, for the radiant vision in tailor-made garments was stepping off the beached boat and its hand touched his and its beautiful, rounded face with the red lips smiled into his until the smile changed to a look of horrified amazement, and then to infinite pity and tenderness.

"John!" she gasped, taking him into her anxious arms like a protecting mother.

It was only one word but its vibrant compassion thrilled his soul and tied his tongue so he could only hold her mutely, as if afraid she would vanish into dreams again.

"John—the lines on your face!" She drew away a little, appraising him intently. "And the terrible look in your eyes! Oh, my poor big boy, how you must have suffered!"

And he saw the tears of pity glisten and wondered what to say.

"Some—some others suffered, too!" he muttered, idiotically.

She quivered and drew a little further away and studied him very thoughtfully, making his heart sink by dropping his hand and shaking her head. A stout American gentleman in business clothes—the secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions—stepped in front of her and grasped McTodd's listless hand and shook it; but his smile, too, vanished as he looked into McTodd's somber face and he turned to the girl, getting a quiet nod and understanding it.

"Come, John," requested the man, gently, as he took one of McTodd's arms and the girl took the other. "Let us go to your bungalow and talk. Come, John!"

It was a coaxing, part-commanding voice that almost tempted the quick-acting McTodd to show who was master right there; but it was also a friendly voice, so he allowed himself to be led along like a dull child while those beside him exchanged glances.

They ate inside the bungalow with the secretary talking of everything but the island and the work; and gradually McTodd's ear became used to the speech of gentlefolk and his mind became saner, as if he were starting to shake off the thrall of a terrible nightmare. The secretary only lost his conversational control once and that was after McTodd had stared past the palm trees outdoors to the sinister reef where surf lashed about in frothing rage like a baffled thing eternally hurled back by demons.

"I've failed!" rasped McTodd suddenly, crashing a heavy fist on the table. "I'm through—I've failed!"

His defiant eyes met the startled ones of the others and he began to rise as if to have it out; but the secretary tugged at his sleeve pleadingly.

"Let us enjoy ourselves now and forget the rest," urged the elderly man. "Later you can show us your island and your work and then, perhaps, we may judge."

McTodd took the hint and listened patiently thereafter to the tale of the secretary's travels while on his tour of inspection; and later, when his hour of paradise was over, McTodd decided with a sigh to let his guests see conditions for themselves, without his telling them. Thus he left them in the bungalow and went below to summon his people and put them through their paces so that his visitors could visualize the thing. Explanations would then be needless—and useless.

ALINING up his warriors, McTodd gave them terse directions and went back to the bungalow and brought his thoughtful, wondering guests to a little knoll. He did not tell them he was planning a queer military review, nor did the astonished visitors have an inkling until solid ranks of brown warriors, keeping step, marched out of a grove of trees into a meadow below the hill.

Subconsciously McTodd found himself curious as to how his savages would act under their own leaders. It was his first chance to stand away from it all and look over his handiwork and he was quickly forced to admit that his cynical handiwork was good. He even found himself owning an apologetic vanity in the matter.

Holding weapons rigidly in their right hands, swinging their left arms in broad arcs like Russian grenadiers, the little savages that McTodd had terrorized into discipline were merged into a compact, businesslike machine that obeyed the English commands of its leaders instantly. First came Makosa, carrying the emblem. Then the prime swordsmen swung across the field in four ranks of twenty-odd men each, keeping perfect alinement. Behind them a hundred spears bobbed and flashed in the sun, flanked on either side by bowmen and skirmishers whose left arms swayed rhythmically as they walked.

Some one started singing. The others took it up and soon the chorus rolled from rank to rank—the grand old hymn of Christianity, quaintly distorted in the queer, savage wording:

"On-gwa Clifton so-jass——"

McTodd glanced toward the secretary at his left and saw the man's jaw drooped in petrified amazement. When he looked around there was something like admiration in his quizzical eyes, but McTodd quickly shifted his glance to the girl at his right. He only saw her straight profile. She was staring below and on her face was a deeper color than he had ever seen before. He found himself trembling.

"And you have failed?" came her vibrant voice, queerly intoned.

"Yes," he murmured, unsteadily. "I—I did not come here to train warriors."

"Perhaps you had to," she replied, "and maybe you builded better than you knew. Look!" She pointed a white-clad arm toward the swinging black column that was counter-marching. "You came here to teach these people at least the forms of our religion. Hear them? They are singing the song of that religion!"

She turned to him and in her eyes he saw a great admiration and triumph, as though he had justified all her mighty faith.

"It's—it's splendid!" she cried. "They have been taught law and order. They are clean and neat. They have learned discipline. Why—it's perfect! Even the cross is 'going on before.' Do you see?" And she pointed toward the fat old chieftain holding the emblem in his right hand.

As if a binding had been stricken from his eyes McTodd gasped, electrified at what he saw. He rubbed his eyes, awake at last. In a flash of vivid understanding he realized that he had planted the seed he had come to plant and opened the ground he had come to open. He was the plowman. He had used dynamite because the soil was hard; but now the top crust was softened and those who came after him need only be the cultivators. The children of these savages could be friends to civilization forevermore. McTodd knew at last that he had not failed.

The white man's methods had been harsh and brutal. He had been goaded to things unthinkable in his sane and Christian state. He had killed. He had denied his Creator. But now his head bowed and tears ran unashamed down his cheeks.

"I see it all now," he choked. "I am His servant after all!"

The girl patted his shoulder tenderly.

"I know," she agreed. "You always were. We all are. With you it was only a question of making these people understand you."

McTodd looked away suddenly, for he felt the old demon of grimness gripping him again—for the last time.

"I did," he nodded.

MAKING GOOD FOR MULEY

By

W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Prevaricated Parade," "Loco or Love," etc.

IF THERE'S a word of truth in that old saying about beauty being only skin deep Susie Abernathy was the thinnest-skinned person I ever saw. I may not be a judge of womanly beauty, and the poetry of my soul may have been shook loose by pitching broncos, and buried deep under a coating of alkali dust, but I sure do sabe when a woman is hard to look at.

Seems to me like it's human nature for a feller with squirrel-teeth, no jaw to speak about and a physique like a corn cultivator to marry a beautiful female, and vice versa—not that "Muley" Bowles qualifies in the beauty division, but at that I reckon he shaded Susie a little.

Muley was a poetical puncher, of considerable avoirdupois, and he found Susie a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Susie was a niece of Zeb Abernathy, who owned a sheep outfit on Willow Creek, and a grouch toward all cowmen—and Muley punched cows for the Cross J outfit, and drew forty a month from old man Whittaker.

I'm not belittling Muley's salary, 'cause I drew the same, and so did "Telescope" Tolliver and "Chuck" Warner. Back in the dim and distant past, when cows first come into style, the old-timers got together and settled the pay of the average cow-hand.

They figured that any normal puncher—if there is such an animal—would try at least three turns of the roulette wheel, at ten dollars per turn. That left him ten dollars. He'd buy some tobacco, some red neckties and perfume, and what was left, at two-bits a drink for hooch, would just carry him a few inches short of the murder and sudden death stage.

I've just been up to the house to draw my stipend from the old man, and am on my way back to the bunk-house, when Muley rides in. He's humped over in his saddle, like Misery going to a cemetery, and if you can stamp despair on a full-sized milk-cheese he had it on his face.

He slips his saddle off, turns his bronc into the corral, leans against the fence and cuts loose the granddaddy of all sighs. There ain't many men that you can hear sigh at pointblank range for a .30-30, but you could with Muley. It was like releasing the air on a freight train.

I wanders down there and passes the time of day with him, but he don't respond. He exhausts deep into his soul once more, and hangs up his saddle.

"Some of your relatives die, Muley?" I asks.

"Hello, Hen," says he, sad-like, "I ain't got no relatives—except one aunt. I don't know whether she's alive or not."

"Name of Bowles?"

"Nope. Name's Allender. Maw's name was Allender, and that's why I was named

Lemule Allender, and—what do you want to know for?"

"You sighed a couple of times," I reminds him, and he nods and looks off across the range.

"Henry, how can I make some money? Regular money. I can't get along on forty a month—no more."

"You aim to marry Susie Abernathy?" I asks.

Muley digs a little trench with the toe of his boot, and shakes his head, sad-like—

"No-o-o, I reckon not, Hen."

"Just come from there?" I asks.

"Uh-huh. Listen, Hen: can you keep a secret? I know danged well that you can't, but I got to talk to somebody. Me and Susie's got it all framed up to get married, but she argues that I got to see Zeb. Susie ain't of age yet, and Zeb is her guardian. Sabe?

"Believe me, Henry, if I owned a penitentiary I'd hire Zeb. I'd a killed him a long time ago if it wasn't for Susie, 'cause no sheep-man can tell me where to head in at—dang his old billy-goat face! He's a darned——"

"Not to change the subject, Muley," says I, "but why don't you ask him?"

"I did. Do you think I'd feel this way over futures? You're darn well right I asked him! Know what he said? He said to me, just like this: 'Mister Bowles, you keep away from Miss Abernathy. She's got her sights set higher than a forty-dollar puncher.'

"That's what he said, Henry, and then I said: 'Mister Abernathy, you're tilting that gun for her: let her do her own shooting," and he said, 'Your reputation ain't none too good, and if the Vigilantes ever organize here Susie would be a widow.' 'You wouldn't know it,' says I, ' 'cause they'd get you first.'

"Muley," says I, "which one of you shot first?"

"Neither one. I beat him on the draw, but you can't kill your sweetheart's guardian. It ain't ethical, Hen. He told me that any old time I could show enough money to buy out his herd I could have Susie. I told him I wasn't in the habit of buying either sheep or wives, and he said he knowed that without me telling him. Said that no forty-a-month puncher was ever that foolish."

"How about Susie—does she love you, Muley?"

"Uh-huh," he sighs, "she sure does. I don't know how she can, but she does."

"I don't know either, Muley, but it takes all kinds of folks to make a world."

"I been thinking of marriage for a long time," he sighs, "I been afraid to ask her, but today she up and kissed me, and that settled it, Hen. Funny what a little kiss will do thataway. It makes me desperate."

"It would have done the same to me, Muley. If a girl like her kissed me I'd likely turn outlaw. You aim to go to Chicago with that train of cows?"

"I can't, Hen. I hope the old man don't ask me to. You going?"

"No. Telescope and Chuck are going, but the old man wants me to act as foreman while they're gone—he's going, too. I'll ask him to let you stay, if you want me to, Muley."

"I'd love you like a brother, Hen," he sighs, "I want to be near her."

That's Muley. Being of a poetical temperament he has to confide in folks. If me or Telescope or Chuck got kissed by a lady we'd cherish the memory to our graves—unless it was Susie, and think of it only when alone.

I ain't so bad to look upon, and a lady couldn't be censured for giving me a kiss, but when it comes to Telescope and Chuck—well, I suppose they'll eventually marry beautiful women.

Telescope is built like a bed-slat, and orates openly that he's a twig of the Tolliver tree, which flourished and bought colored help in Kentucky before the plans were drawn for the pyramids. Chuck Warner don't claim nothing, and don't get sore if you subtract from his ancestry. He was born west of the Arizona line, and if he descended from anybody it was Ananias.

Chuck's legs are as short as his memory, and he was born with the face of a horse and the trusting eyes of an angel. He never told the truth but once. A big feller, from down below Mesquite, took him down and bumped his head on the ground.

"You got enough?" asks the big person, and Chuck howls—

"Plenty!"

"You ain't lying, are you?" asks the feller, after he lets Chuck up.

Chuck brushes off his clothes and shakes his sore head:

"No! Dang it all! I wasn't in no position to lie about it!"

MULEY told me that I couldn't keep a secret, and I didn't. Me and Chuck and Telescope rides to town that afternoon, to foller out the usual program expected of punchers with a month's pay aboard, and I tells them about Muley's troubles.

"He's more to be censured than pitied," admits Chuck. "I don't blame Zeb, but I do hate a shepherd what thinks a puncher ain't good enough for his relatives."

"Poor Muley," says Telescope, sad-like, "any man what is just one aunt shy of being an orphan has my sympathy. I'll promise you, Hen, that I'll do all I can."

"In Muley's name I thanks you," says I, "but if you can't do it for Muley don't do it on my account. I ain't going to marry her. I just feel sorry for him. I'd feel sorry for anybody what was in love with Susie."

"She ain't exactly of the vampire type," agrees Chuck. "Muley's got one dead immortal cinch though: nobody's going to come along and steal her away from him."

"Zeb says he'll have to marry her over his dead body or bring money enough to buy out his sheep," says I.

"The latter is the more revolting," says Telescope. "Tell Muley we'll fix it for him after we get back if we have to steal Zeb's sheep so he won't have nothing to sell."

The next few days we're a busy crew, loading twenty cars of beef for Chicago, and we don't have much time for conversation. Muley is too fat to herd 'em up the chute, so he sets down cross-legged on top of a car, and checks off the loads. Zeb Abernathy comes over to the yards and sets down on top of the fence, along with a lot of other loafers, and when Telescope sees him he crosses the corral and sets down beside Zeb.

"Howdy, Zeb," says Telescope, rolling a smoke. "You going to leave here after you sells out, or are you going to make your home with Susie and her husband?"

"Hu-u-u-u-h?" grunts Zeb, amazed-like, "what's that you said?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Telescope, slapping Zeb on the back. "You can't keep things like that a secret around here, old-timer. What'll we bring to the charivari—sheep-shears or tin cans?"

Zeb sets there, working his jaws faster and faster over his tobacco, and pretty soon he looks up at Muley. Muley grins at him, and nods. That's the last straw.

"Muley's going to buy out Zeb and marry his niece," states Telescope to Johnny Myers, owner of the Triangle brand. "Muley's going to be a sheep-king, Johnny."

All this time Zeb has been getting off the fence, and he's so mad that he dances a jig in the dust when he hits the ground.

"Ya-a-a-a-ah!" he whoops, waving his long arms like a swarm of bees was after him. "Telescope Tolliver, you're a liar if you think it! Marry that fat, forty-dollar fool! Buy my herd! Say, he ain't never had money enough to buy a wool sock! Ya-a-a-a-ah! You think you're funny, don't you?"

"Ya-a-a-ah!" mimics Chuck, wiggling his ears. "Zebbie, you're learning. Now the chorus—ba-a-a-a-a-ah!"

Zeb's feelings can't stand no more, so he turns around like a man with a sore throat, and goes back toward town stiff-legged like a bear with a peeve on.

"Zeb loves you fellers," laughs Johnny. "I heard him say this morning that there's just five things he hates. One is a rattlesnake and the other four draws a salary from Whittaker. What's he sore at you fellers for? Has the sheep affected his brain?"

"Such a theory is absurd, Johnny," says I. "It can't be proved, 'cause nobody with brains ever mixes up with sheep. You can't corrupt a coyote."

A little later on me and Muley are setting on the fence, when Telescope climbs up beside us and talks to Muley like a father.

"You realize what this here marriage stuff means, Muley?" he asks. "You sure you ain't just sick like a calf for it's maw?"

"I know my own heart, liver and lights, Telescope," replies Muley.

"Really love her with all your heart and soul, eh? Say, I'll bet you'd turn her down cold if it was to your advantage."

"You dang well know I wouldn't!

"Suppose," says Telescope, "suppose somebody said to you: 'Muley, I'll give you a year's salary if you'll keep away from Susie? What would you do?"

"Me? I'd rise up on my hind legs and inform him that my love ain't for sale. Sabe? Not for the salary of a lifetime."

Telescope thinks it over for a while, and then shakes his head, sad-like:

"Maybe you would, Muley. I sure hopes you gets them sheep, 'cause you qualifies for the shepherd class without no fixing. I've read about love making a fool out of a man, but—well, it ain't no funeral of mine."

That night we shakes hands with Telescope and Chuck and the old man, and wishes them many happy returns of the day.

"Don't give up the ship, Muley," advises Telescope. "Do a lot of thinking while we're gone, and if you can figure out any way of making money, without robbing a bank, me and Chuck will put her over for you, eh, Chuck?"

"A stiff upper lip gathers no mustache," proclaims Chuck, "and a faint heart never rustled no sheep, Muley. So-long, you pitch-fork puncher. And, Hen-ree, don't fall in love. One shepherd in the family is a plenty."

Me and Muley rides back to the ranch, but Muley ain't got much to say. Love is a queer little animal, and affects folks different. Muley's was the dark-blue variety, with circles around the eyes.

The next morning after breakfast Muley gets a sheet of paper and a pencil, and seems to compose deep-like. After a while he cuts loose a deep sigh, and looks, dreamy-like, at the ceiling.

"I'm here," says I. "Can I help you in any way, Muley?"

"I've got it," he sighs. "You can't appreciate it, 'cause you ain't got no finer feelings, but I'll recite it to you:

"I loved a darling angel,
  And she loved me quite a lot.
Her ears are like the clam shell,
  And I can forget her not.
She's doomed to marry money,
  And my heart will break, I think,
If I don't wed this angel,
  I will drown myself in drink."

"Nice sentiment," I applauded. "Bobby Burns never had nothing on you except the long sound of his r's, but you'll have to put off your demise for at least another month. You can't do an artistic job of drownding in a couple of dollars' worth of hooch. If you was to get in over your depth in liquor, Muley, what brand would you prefer?"

Right then Muley gets sore at me. I finds that you can josh a man about love just so far, and then he turns like a worm and tries to bite me.

FOR the next few days he writes poetry in the evening, and is absent most all day. He ain't a pleasant critter to talk to, so I spends most of my time playing solitaire. One day down in Paradise I runs across Susie.

"Seen Muley lately?" I asks, and she shakes her head.

"No. Uncle Zeb ordered him off the ranch, and since then I've only seen him at a distance. He—he said he was going to try and convince uncle that he's something more than an ordinary cowboy. Do you think he can, Mister Peck?"

"Not unless uncle loses his sense of sight. Muley is pining away, day by day, and unless something comes up to relieve the situation he'll be able to go through a door without turning the knob. I know this is a leading question, Miss Abernathy, but would you marry that Lemuel Bowles if you had a good chance?"

"Why—er—uh-huh," says she, nodding her head brave-like, while her ears get hot enough to light a cigaret on.

"I feel sorry for Muley," says I, letting her take it any way she wants to, and then I lopes away, 'cause I sees Zeb coming.

The next morning we ain't no more than out of bed when in rides old Paddy Morse. Paddy runs the post-office, along with his little store, and this is the first time I ever seen him at the Cross J.

"Is Le-mule Allender Bowles to home?" he inquires, peering over his specs at me.

"Right here, Paddy," says Muley. "What do you want?"

"Letter for you. Reckon it's for you, 'cause there ain't no other Bowles around this here neck of the woods. You got to sign your full name, same as on that letter or I can't let you have it. Sabe?

"This here is a special delivery letter—darn such things! Uncle Sam forces me to ride plumb up here to deliver this or take the consequences, which I believe is three hundred days in jail or a year—sign right on that line. Now, I reckon I'll go on back. Hope it ain't bad news, Muley. Mostly always a letter of that kind or a telegram means death. Come from Milwaukee. You got any kin in Milwaukee?"

But Muley has gone back into the house,

and Paddy don't get the information he seeks.

About fifteen minutes later Muley comes down to the bunk-house, where I'm putting some rosettes on a new bridle, and he's got a grin plumb across his fat face. I glances at him and goes on working.

"Henry," says he, after a little while, "would you like to have a job herding my sheep?"

"Your sheep? Sure. I'll herd all you got in my sleep."

"I'm going to be the richest man in Yaller Rock County," he proclaims.

"You better talk lower, Muley," I advises. "If the county commissioners hear you talk thataway they'll way-bill you to the loco-lodge at Warm Springs."

"You remember me telling you about my Aunt Agnes, Hen? She died."

"And left you a sheep?" I asks.

"Sheep—always sheep! Take a look at this."

He hands me a letter—the one what Paddy brought him, and I looks her over. The brand opines it to be from Milwaukee, and the top of the letter proclaims that Frederick & Quincy are lawyers. She listens something like this:

> DEAR SIR:
>
> It grieves us to inform you that your aunt, Miss Agnes Allender, of this city, died on the fifth day of August, 1900.
>
> According to her last will and testament, you, which she designates as her favorite nephew, will inherit the bulk of her estate, which is valued at about one hundred thousand dollars.
>
> As you likely know she was a very eccentric person, and her will imposes you as follows: without receiving a cent of said inheritance you must, before the fifteenth day of August, 1900, have invested four-fifths of said hundred thousand dollars in sheep.
>
> She also designates that: the said Lemuel Allender Bowles must not marry for the space of five years under penalty of forfeiture of entire inheritance. Also that he take a care for Alfred and Amelia for the rest of their natural lives. All of the foregoing requests must be complied with or my estate is to be divided between charitable institutions aforementioned in my will.
>
> On the fifteenth day of August, 1900, our representative will call on you and examine your investments. We wish you luck.

I hands it back to him, and goes on working.

"Well," says he, sort of choking-like," don't I get congratulated?"

"As soon as I gets time I'm going to feel sorry for you, Muley. How in thunder can you invest eighty thousand dollars around here, when everybody knows you ain't got a cent, and everybody hates sheep. You can't get married for five years, and you've got to feed, water and groom Alfred and Amelia all the rest of their natural lives. Wonder what them twin-sounding things are, Muley?"

Muley sets to thinking it over, and folding and unfolding that letter:

"Since you sympathized with me, things don't look so rosy," he admits, with a deep sigh. "Reckon I missed that marrying part. If Alfred and Amelia got a fair start they ought to be about due. Reckon I'll ride down to Paradise—dang the luck! I've torn that letter plumb in two!"

He puts the two pieces in his vest pocket and goes off down to the corral.

The longer I thinks things over the harder it looks for Muley. Muley ain't got the reputation of a saint around here, and can't even lie so folks will believe him. Zeb owns all the visible supply of sheep, and Muley ain't got no time to spare if he's going to make good.

Along about noon Muley rides in. He's got a big bundle under one arm and a big box under the other. He deposits his plunder on the steps, and sets down. I sets down beside him to wait until he gets through sighing, when all to once a squeaky voice yells:

"Way 'round 'em, Shep! Who's crazy!"

I hops plumb off the steps, and whirls with my gun ready. Muley looks at me, sad-like, and sighs again—

"That's Alfred, Henry."

"Alfred?" I asks. "Alfred who?"

"I don't know. Nobody introduced me, but it don't matter—Alfred is a parrot."

"Oh!" says I, "what's Amelia—a lady bug?"

"Naw-w-w! Cat."

"*Squr-r-r-r-reek!* Sheep dip! Sheep dip! Har, har, har! *Squr-r-reek!*" announces Alfred.

"Hen, what's the natural life of a parrot?" asks Muley, without lifting his head.

"I don't know. Why the question?"

"That letter specifies 'natural lifetime.' That's the joker."

"Did it say that?"

"Sure did. Wait, I'll show you." He fumbles around in his pockets for a while, and then looks foolish-like at me: "The front half of that letter is gone, Henry!

Now, where in thunder did I drop that?"

He hunts some more but his pockets don't essay a trace.

"Har, har, har! Way 'round 'em, Shep!" shrieks Alfred, and Muley kicks the cage off the porch.

"Shut up! You cross between a duck and a phonygraph! You ain't yelped nothing but sheep-talk since I got you. No wonder Aunt Agnes died—she must have had ticks!"

"You ain't showing proper respect for the dead, Muley," I reminds him.

"Is that so!" he yelps. "Is that so! Well, dog-gone it, Hen, she didn't show no respect for the living when she shipped me these trinkets, did she? Sending a puncher a sheep-talking buzzard ain't showing a whole lot of respect. That cat is so old I'll have to feed it on a bottle, and——"

"Sheep dip!" screams Alfred. "Who's crazy?"

Muley throws his coat over the cage, and slams the whole works into the house. He follers it inside, and I sets there for a while thinking things over. The slats on Amelia's home ain't none too secure, so I loosens one end, and as I goes inside the bunk-house I sees Amelia trotting off toward the barn.

Muley comes down after a while and sets down on the bunk. "Alfred danged near bit my finger off, and Amelia's made her getaway, Hen," he announces in a sad voice. "Amelia was down there on the corral fence, making faces at Chuck's coyote pup, and she offers fight when I tries to calm her spirits. Aunt Agnes must have been a nut over ferocious animals."

"Nevertheless she was your mother's sister, and left you all her wealth," I chides him.

"Yah! Like throwing both ends of a rope to a drownding man, and forgetting to hang on to the middle. Can't marry for five—huh!"

He gets up and stomps out of the place, and I opines that Muley's inheritance is beginning to bear down upon his immortal soul.

THE next day Hank Padden, who owns the Seven A outfit, shows up, and sets down with me in the parlor. Muley is washing up, and when Hank asks for him he yells that he'll be out in a minute.

"I'm going to make Muley an offer," says Hank to me, confident-like. "I hears that he's going to get married, and I needs a foreman what is a married man. Sabe? Single men ain't got nothing to hold 'em down. I like Muley—dang his fat carcass—and I rides over here to see him."

"Uh-huh," says I, 'cause there ain't nothing else to say, and then Hank yells at Muley:

"Come out here, you half-ton puncher! I want to talk to you about——"

"Sheep dip! Sheep dip! Har, har, har!"

I know it's Alfred, but if it don't sound like Muley I'll eat my quirt. Same little wheeze that Muley has in his laugh.

Hank comes to his feet like a shot, and glares at the half-closed door. He puts on his hat, walks straight out of the door, gets on his bronc and fogs away from the Cross J.

I hears a crash in the next room, a couple of shrieks, and out comes Alfred with most of his tail feathers missing. He sails around the room a couple of times, finally hits the open door, and perches on the hitch-rack in front of the house.

Muley comes out, with a shotgun in his hand, and glares around.

"Natural lifetime, Muley," I informs him, and he tosses the gun on the sofa.

"That bird will be the death of me, Henry!" he wails, "yelping sheep-talk at Hank Padden is like lighting a cigaret with a stick of dynamite. What did he want of me?"

"He came over to sympathize with you about your aunt."

"Oh!" says Muley, blank-like, looking out of the window. "Ain't this Wick Smith coming?"

It was Wick. He ties his bronc and comes inside. To hear him talk you'd think that rheumatism had typhoid-pneumonia and bubonic plague beat so far that you could cure 'em both with internal applications of peach pie.

"I got to get away from here," states Wick, after we discusses the weather a while. "Every season I lives here brings me that much nearer the grave. I want to take a pardner into my store, and while I ain't decided exactly about it, I comes up here to have a talk with Muley. I needs new blood in my place, and I got to have a married man, which has a little money. Sabe?"

"You got any sheep?" I asks.

Wick sets up straight and glares at me.

"Sheep? I'm a merchant—not a shepherd!"

"Wool is good for rheumatism," says I, offhand-like, trying to smooth over my mistake.

"If you're looking for a married man with money you sure got into the wrong pew, Mister Smith," states Muley.

"Zeb told me that you had an aunt—" begins Wick, wise-like, and then:

Squr-r-r-r-reek! Meo-o-o-o-ow! Yip, yip, yip!

First comes Amelia. She's traveling so blamed fast that she looks like a string of about six cats. Right behind her comes that coyote pup, digging deep into his soul for joyful sounds, and behind him, screeching and screaming comes Alfred, and they invades the parlor.

Wick hops to his feet as they enters, and of course he's the highest point in the room. A cat will always hit for elevation—therefore Wick got Amelia. Me and Muley sort of draws back to keep the score, but things happens too fast for computation. Amelia draws all four feet together in Wick's scalp, the same of which makes Wick wrinkle up his face, and forget the rheumatism in his legs. The bird and the coyote don't do much except cut circles until Wick starts, blind-like to leave there, and falls over a chair.

Wick turns over once, lands on his hands and knees, and pilgrims out of the door, with the cat prospecting his dandruff, Alfred hopping up and down on his back, and the coyote pup hanging on to his coattails, and skidding along, making little snappy barks of delight.

They all rolls off the porch, where the three animals tangles up, leaving Wick alone. He forks his bronc in a hurry, and sets there rubbing the haze out of his eyes.

Amelia is setting a new cross-country record for cats, as she hunts for a high spot, and the pup is singing along right behind her.

Alfred walks circles around a post for a few seconds, and then flutters to the top of the hitch-rack. He ruffles up what feathers he's got left, cocks his head on one side and screeches:

"Har, har, har! Sheep dip! Who's crazy?"

"My gosh!" explodes Wick. "That cyclone hit me so hard that I can see green eagles and hear 'em talk!" and he backs his bronc away, cautious-like, and leaves us in a hurry.

Me and Muley looks at each other for a while, and then Muley yawns:

"I must have lost that piece of letter where Zeb could find it. Well, it didn't say nothing about buying sheep, anyway, Hen."

"Lucky it didn't, Muley. If the community thought you intended to bring eighty thousand dollars' worth of sheep on to this range you'd be the honored guest at a cravat party. Your auntie didn't understand conditions when she wrote that will, Muley."

"Why emphasize 'when she wrote that will,' Henry!" he asks, sad-like. "After looking at Alfred and Amelia—well, Henry, there's a destiny what shapes our ends."

Next morning at breakfast we're interrupted. Comes a thump of feet outside the door, and a voice yells—

"Hello, the house!"

"Hello the ——!" says I. "That sounds like Zeb Abernathy, Muley."

Muley steps over and picks up the old man's shotgun.

"Let him in, Henry," says he. "If he comes on the prod I'll scatter his remains to the four winds.

I opens the door, and the old pelican bows to me like I was the fourth king in the deck to enter his hand.

"Howdy, Henry," says he, and then he happens to see Muley with the shotgun. "I comes in sorrow not in anger," he states, "my soul is filled with contrition."

"As long as she's filled with something I'll save my buckshot," opines Muley. "Come on in and rest your ticks, Zeb Abernathy."

"Nice weather," observes Zeb, mopping his face with a red handkerchief. "May rain and it may not. I kind of look for a dry spell."

"The Weather Bureau at Washington gets out annual reports, which reach us too late, so we thanks you for the information," says Muley.

"I hope I see you both well," opines Zeb.

"Your eyesight don't worry me none to speak about," states Muley. "The last time I meets up with you I made you throw your gun down the well. How's your sentiments concerning me at present?"

"I'm filled with meekness and contrition, as I aforementioned, Le-mule. It aches my heart to know that I provoked you thataway, and I pilgrims over here to make amends. Sabe?"

"Why this sudden change of attitude?" inquires Muley, and Zeb sort of squirms in his chair.

"She comes to me like a yelp in the night," says he, pious-like, "I gets to thinking thusly: 'Le-mule Allender Bowles, I ain't treated you right. I hops on to you like a coyote on a carcass, and reviles you abusive-like, 'cause you desires to marry into my family. I lets my interest in Susie blind me to her best interests, but now I sheds the scales off my eyes, and comes out into the sunshine of true understanding.'

"The more I thinks about it, Le-mule, the worse I feels. Youth calls to youth, and what is stronger than the call of true love? She ain't never yelped at me, boys, but I'm a heap wise. While Le-mule is only getting forty a month now, I feels that in the due course of time he'll be a shining light of the community, and maybe go to Congress."

"Good sentiments, Zeb," I agrees, "but it will likely be a close race between the voters and the sheriff to decide whether he goes to Helena or Deer Lodge."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Zeb. "Muley will never go to the penitentiary."

"Not willingly," I agrees. "What are your sheep worth today?"

"I have no sheep, Henry," he grins. "Sold out to a feller from St. Marie's basin, and his drive started today. Yep. I'm a civilian now."

"Got a good price, too," he grins, when he sees me look foolish-like at Muley. "Glad I sold. Too much sentiment against sheep. Well, boys, I reckon I'll toddle along. I couldn't sleep until I comes over and squares myself with Le-mule. Come over and make yourself to home at my place, Le-mule."

"Thanks, Zeb-uleon," says Muley," I may do that little thing, Zeb-uleon. How's Susie, Zeb-uleon?"

"Tolable, Le-mule. She's pining."

We watches him ride away, and then Muley spits, reflectively:

"Henry, if that old pelican had called me Le-mule once more I'd have slaughtered him. He must have found that letter I lost."

"You ought to invest your money in a detective agency, and run it yourself. I suppose you'll go over to see Susie?"

"Dang well know I will! Why not?"

"Go ahead. Go ahead, Muley, and lose a hundred thousand. What's a fortune beside her? Your brain ain't big enough, Muley. When it gets over forty dollars it all looks alike to you. You take my advice and buy sheep."

"Yah-h-h-h!" he blats. "Where?"

"What will you give me if I buy 'em for you?" I asks.

"You? You got a dead aunt, too, Henry?"

"No, but I got brains, and I can buy sheep."

"Go buy 'em then!" he snaps, "I'm from Missouri—me."

MULEY rides away in the general direction of his heart's desire, and I gets an inspiration. Over in St. Marie's basin is plenty of sheep, and I never saw a sheep-man yet what wouldn't sell out. I like Muley. Dog-gone his irresponsible heart, I like him. His mind ain't big enough to contemplate a hundred thousand dollars, and I feels glad for him that he's got a friend like me to make good for him.

I may be rewarded for my efforts, and maybe not, but anyway I've always wanted to handle big money, and show to the world that Henry Peck could be more than he's ever showed.

I saddles up Glory and puts a pack on Blazer, and leaves a note for Muley, telling him that I'll be back on the fatal day to save him from ruin. Little Henry is going to be a hero, and hopes to do his heroing on a commission basis.

I pilgrims over into a country that cowmen designates as being a fair example of the place where sinners will reside in the hereafter, and eats mutton and talks sheep.

Believe me I could talk sheep faster than the men that owned the herds, and I confides in 'em about Muley's inheritance. Of course I didn't tell it all, but anyway I got options on enough sheep to cause Yaller Rock County to build an extra wing on the insane asylum, and said options didn't cost me a cent.

"Old Testament" Tilton rides back with me. I've spent about fifteen thousand of Muley's credit with him, and being a minister, he's a little suspicious of his fellow-men.

"I ride with you for the good of my soul," orates the old boy, when he offers to accompany me.

I reckon that when a shepherd goes into cow-land, it's like taking a ship into fresh water to knock off the barnacles.

He's a queer old coot. Imagine a man of his cognomen, add the smell of sheep, dress him up around the neck like a preacher, tuck his pants into the top of a pair of heavy boots, and you've got a portrait of Old Testament. He rides a little calico bronc, with one cropped ear and a rat-tail, and calls it Ebenezer. The only way, I figure, that he could ever hand out salvation would be by correspondence.

"Now, this here Le-mule Bowles," remarks the old boy, "do you think I could induce him to come into the vineyard?"

"Muley will go into anything that's got a door on it," says I. "Also, he'll take anything what ain't nailed down."

"I fear me it will be a task," he says, sadlike, and then he sort of brightens up. "Have you ever considered your soul?"

"I have no soul," says I.

"Say not that you are a lost sheep," he chides me, and it makes me sore, and I points off down the valley.

"We're in cow-land now, old-timer, so you lay off on that lost-sheep stuff. Sabe? Down here they calls 'em plain strays."

We plods down into the Sleeping Creek country, and stops at Hank Padden's place for dinner. Old Testament and Hank are old friends, but Hank don't more than give me a nod. I reckon he ain't forgot what he thought was Muley's voice, and he blames me, too. When we gets ready to leave Hank acts like I had a contagious disease.

"Drop in any old time, Tilton," says Hank. "Glad to see you."

"Me, too, Hank?" I asks, and he gives me a hard look.

"You travels on your own responsibility," he replies.

"I wonder what Hank is sore at me for?" I asks Old Testament, a little later, but he shakes his head, and mumbles something about the flocks on the seven hills and the wrath to come.

"Did you tell him that I bought them sheep?" I asks, and he nods.

"Yea. I did not lie, Henry Peck. I know naught of Bowles."

"I suppose you also told him that I was going to stock this here range with sheep, didn't you?"

"I merely told him that I surmised so."

We rides almost to the Cross J, when we overtakes Abe Evans, the depot agent at Paradise.

"Gosh! I'm glad you caught me," pants Abe, "I never was built to fit a saddle, and this here nag ain't no rocking-chair. Here's a telegram for Lemule Bowles, charges paid. You sign for it, Hen, and let me go back home."

We pilgrims on to the ranch, but Muley ain't there. There's a note on the table which orates that he'll be there at three o'clock, and it's addressed to Weinie Lopp, of the Triangle.

"This here telegram ought to be opened," opines Old Testament, who is as nosey as a pet coon. "A telegram always means that something is going to happen, and it's better to be prepared."

I tears the cover off and looks her over. It says—

> Will arrive your town this date meet me with a vehicle.

And she's signed Frederick & Quincy.

I looks at my watch and decides on quick action.

"You set down here and rest your feet," says I to Old Testament, "I'll hitch up the buckboard, and go to town. I just got enough time to get there."

That was some ride. Them broncs were as wild as deer, and we went to Paradise so fast that the dust didn't settle for thirty minutes after I ties up at the station.

The train is late, so I goes over to Mike Pelly's place, and washes the sheep-taste out of my throat. It takes quite a lot of liquid, and when I goes back to the station I'm sheep-proof.

The train pulls in and I spots my man. There's quite a crowd at the station, but I knowed him the minute he got off, and it takes me about three steps to get where he's standing. Being sheep-proof, I'm also polite, so I takes his valise away from him, and starts for the rig.

"Come on, Blackstone," says I, "your carriage waits without."

He starts with me, but he seems to complain a heap, so I stops and asks him whyfore the objections.

"Where the Sam Hill are you taking my bag?" he asks, getting red in the face. "Who told you to take that valise?"

"Mister," says I, "don't excite yourself thataway. I'm doing all I can to make you comfortable. Sabe? I advises you to come along peaceable, and anything you may say will be used against you."

I always thought that lawyers tried to settle things peaceably, but I don't reckon this one runs true to form, 'cause he hit me so hard under the chin that he drove my head right up to the top of my hat. That hat always was too small, but after that wallop I has to stuff the sweat-band with paper so she'll fit.

The train is pulling out when I wakes up, and I sees that fat feller standing on the rear platform.

"What was you aiming to do, Hen?" asks Bill McFee, our sheriff, who is setting beside me on the platform.

"That was the feller I was here to meet, Bill," says I. "He's sure a sudden son-of-a-gun for a lawyer."

"He ain't no lawyer, Henry," says Bill. "He's the railroad paymaster, and he thought you was trying to steal his roll."

"Wrong man," says I. "Seen any stranger get off the train?"

Bill shakes his head, so I pilgrims around to where I tied my rig, and there sets Telescope, Chuck and the old man. Them three acts like they was tickled stiff, and Telescope yelps at me—

"Got the telegram, did you, Henry?"

I don't have nothing to say, and that seems to make 'em more joyful. I don't keep silent from choice, but that feller darn near unjointed my jaw and she hurts like thunder when I opens my face.

"Muley still wearing crape?" asks Chuck, as we ride out of town, and all three of 'em busts out laughing.

"Danged mean trick," opines the old man. "You remember Jimmy Frederick, don't you, Hen? He was out here a few years ago. He knows Muley well. We were up in his office and Telescope and Chuck got him to write that letter."

"How many sheep has Muley bought on his nerve?" asks Chuck.

"Come on through, Hen. Did he buy out Zeb's herd? I hope he ain't got mutton for our supper." And then Telescope sings sort of plaintive like:

"I love a little chicken and I love a little fish.
When somebody says 'ham and eggs,' I pass along my dish.
When I get good and hungry I could eat a roarin' bull,
But when they passes mutton meat my stummick's full."

And then Chuck joins in the chorus:

"I'm a tough old rooster, and I've eaten snakes,
I've spread giant powder on my buckwheat cakes,
I've drank rawhide stew 'till I was out of breath,
But when they serves up mutton meat I starves to death."

"You're a fine bunch of friends!" I snaps, taking a chance that my jaw is still on its hinges. "She was his favorite relative, and since that letter he ain't done nothing but mope. You're a danged bunch of ghoul comedians. Muley's due to kill somebody when he finds out about it. What was the main idea?"

"Well," laughs Telescope, "we made him rich for a while, didn't we? Zeb orates that he wants Susie to marry money, so we gave it to him in a lump. We puts in that marriage clause just to see if Muley loved her enough to lose the money. Sabe? We knowed danged well that he couldn't buy no sheep. What did the parrot have to say, Hen?"

"Told Hank Padden he could use sheep dip."

"Haw, haw, haw!" whoops Chuck. "Did he honest say that? I sat up all one night and day trying to teach that parrot some sheep-talk, but all it ever did was to bite me. Telescope swiped that cat at the depot in Milwaukee."

JUST before we reaches the ranch three people rides in ahead of us and waits for us to come up. It's Hank Padden, Johnny Myers and "Scenery" Sims. They all got rifles.

We exchanges greetings, but they don't seem glad to see nobody but me.

"We don't aim to be nosey, Mr. Peck," says Hank, "but we'd admire to hear a little more about them sheep."

"What sheep?" I asks, surprised-like.

"Old Testament told me," says Hank. "He spoke about you going to start a herd here and——"

"I thanks you for the compliment," says I. "It seems nice to be mistaken for a capitalist, Hank, but what I wants to know is this: how long since have you been taking the word of a shepherd? Do I need to deny it?"

"Old Testament must have lied, Hank,"

states the old man. "He must have been crazy to state such a thing. Somebody's crazy anyway."

"That's what I said," squeaks Scenery. "Hen Peck couldn't buy a pair of wool socks."

They all nods sort of agreeable-like, and he drives on.

"After a while, when there ain't nobody around to interrupt us, I'm going to ask you a few questions, Henry," states Chuck, solemn-like.

"You better bring a witness," says I. "All I wants is an uninterested third party present so I can prove I shot in self-defense."

We pulls up to the ranch. The front door is open and two rigs are tied out in front. We pilgrims up to the door, and are greeted with some sight.

There's Old Testament standing in the middle of the room, with his eyes rolled toward the rafters, while in front of him stands Susie Abernathy and Muley Bowles. Muley's vest is stretched to the bursting point, and you could light a match on Susie's freckles.

To one side stands Zeb Abernathy, and on the other stands Weinie Lopp, all dressed up in a celluloid collar, and no place to put his hands.

We hears Old Testament finish up his prayer, and as Muley folds Susie to his bosom we troops inside. Muley sees us over Susie's shoulder, and breaks the clinch. Zeb grins out through his whiskers and Weinie Lopp turns up the collar of his coat.

Everything is still for a few seconds, and then Old Testament smiles at me over his specs:

"My son," says he, "it's fortunate that I came with you. I had considered taking a trip over into the Bitter Roots, and Mister Lopp would have missed me."

"Exactly," says I, having the understanding of a fish. "All very true. Was Weinie on your trail?"

"Uh-huh," gurgles Weinie, "I—I was after a preacher for Muley."

"They—they just got married," chuckles Zeb. "Just now."

"Well," says Chuck, foolish-like, "who gets the first kiss from the bride—after you, Muley?"

"Muley, you're a hero!" gasps Telescope. "Any man is a hero who will sacrifice a hundred thousand dollars at the throne of love. Everybody take off your hats to Muley Bowles."

Everybody's got their hats off so we don't respond.

"What did you mean by that, Telescope?" gasps Zeb. "Do—do you mean that he—he'll lose all that money 'cause he married Susie?"

"You said it, Zeb," grins Telescope." Ain't you proud of him? What a nephew-in-law!" and then he turns to Muley: "Muley, old-timer, I didn't think you had it in you, but you never can tell which way a dill pickle will squirt. How does it seem to lose a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Well," grins Muley, putting one arm around the shrinking bride. "I ain't lying to you when I says I don't know how it feels. You see, Telescope, the name of Allender don't cover no branch of my family-tree, and I never had any Aunt Agnes."

There's a painful silence for a minute, and then comes a flutter of feathers, and in waddles Alfred. He ain't got no tail-feathers left, and the rest of his carcass is pretty well plucked. He looks us over, wild-eyed, ruffles up his remaining foliage, croaks:

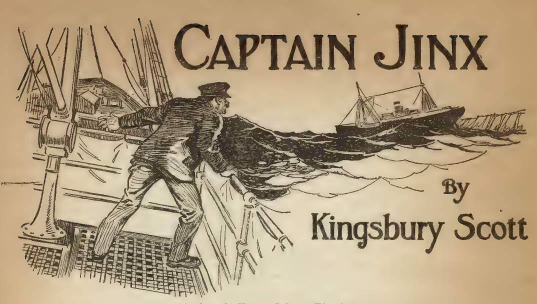
"Har, har, har! Who's crazy?"

Zeb looks wide-eyed at the bird for a moment, and then sneaks past it and out on the steps:

"I'm going away," says he, in a low, hoarse voice. "Going away before that bird answers its own questions."

"Tally three more," states Telescope, and him and Chuck and the old man sneaks out.

"Make it five," says I, and me and Weinie goes out, too.



CAPTAIN JINX

By Kingsbury Scott

Author of "Young Johnny Eistedt."

THE call for bottoms on salt water threatened to sweep the lakes clear of craft, with tons of coal to be shipped to the upper lakes and bushels of wheat to be carried from Lake Superior. Whole fleets of new canal-size steel ships were being fitted for salt-water service, and wooden craft were being rushed on the stocks to follow them.

Everybody had a job or the prospect of one and hundreds of licensed officers were taking advantage of the let-down of the bars in the inspection service to post up for the salt-water examinations. Masters came in plenty to brush up on navigation, and engineers added condensing engine knowledge to their fresh-water experience, all tempted by the bonus of the merchant marine, which made them forget the submarines in their dreams of a luxurious time ashore when a few voyages across the sea had been finished.

Every licensed sailor man in Lakeport seemed fired by the same idea—all except Captain Johnny Rice.

The fact is, Johnny Rice had not sailed a boat for five years, for the very simple reason that he had not been offered one to sail. Five years before, the superintendent of the Superior Transit Company had told him that the company had nothing for him, but advised him to wait until something turned up in the line. So for five years Johnny Rice had waited.

He had seen the new boats come up from the Ecorse and the Wyandotte yards, with youngsters who had wheeled for him, on their bridges, but still he waited for something to turn up. Each Spring he made his application for a berth to the superintendent, until it had become merely a matter of form to him as well as to the superintendent.

In the meantime Johnny Rice had to work at something to keep his board paid at Mother Reagan's, so he took a job as floor boss in the Hudson Line's warehouses, where the hours were long and he earned sixty a month.

Johnny knew the reason as well as any sailor along the water-front and it cut into his sensitive nature to hear them discussing him as "Captain Jinx." He could not forget that he was the man who had rammed the bow out of the *Clarion* against the Broadway Bridge in Milwaukee. Neither could he escape the recollection that he was the man who had torn the bottom out of the *Hesperia* on the north crib at Lakeport one foggy morning.

Worst of all, he knew he was marked from one end of the lakes to the other as the man who had rammed the passenger steamer *Corunna* in St. Mary's River with the Superior Line's big freighter, *Baltic*, and sent both ships to the bottom with too many of their people with them.

The Government inspectors had not exactly blamed him entirely for the accident. They had merely suspended his license for the remainder of that season. But the Superior Line, with damage suits to pay, had gone a bit farther. They had appeared to have suspended him indefinitely, retaining him in their service from year to year—without pay.

Furthermore, he had been black-listed by every insurance company and every other line on the lakes. In fact, bad luck had seemed to follow him from the very day he walked out of the inspector's office at Lakeport with his master's license. Though he felt that he had earned his title, Captain Jinx, he resented it none-the-less.

"It's the bad luck that's followin' me," he comforted himself. "And it's been bad luck after me since the day I went aboard a ship of my own. I'd get away from it if they'd give me a chance."

The hours were long, the pay was small and the work in the warehouse grated on the sensitive nerves of Captain Johnny Rice in the five years which followed the *Corunna* affair, but there seemed no ray of light shining ahead of him.

Then the war came on. The sound of the boiler-makers' hammers beat the silence at deserted wharves and the odor of fresh paint filled the air. Smoke curled from the stacks of the foul-bottomed ships, which had not turned a wheel for years. The freights were up and going higher and there were not bottoms enough to carry the cargoes. Everything which could pass the inspection was going back into commission.

JOHNNY RICE was in the midst of a cloud of flour dust in the warehouse one morning when he saw Felton, the superintendent of the Superior Line, dodging between the long line of rumbling trucks, trying to avoid being run down by the "hunky" handlers. Something told Johnny that the superintendent wanted him and he started forward through the dust.

"I'm looking for you, Johnny," announced the superintendent. "Something's turned up at last. Do you want a boat to sail?"

"That I do, sir," promptly responded the dusty man. "What's it to be?"

"The *Swain*," answered Felton. "We're fitting her out and I've got to have her right away. I want a good man to sail her."

He did not tell Johnny Rice that he had been trying to find a man for two days, to sail the *Philip Swain*, and it would have made little difference if he had. Captain Jinx had enough of the warehouse and he would have taken command of one of the Columbus caravels had it been offered to him.

"The hoodoo, eh?" he remarked, with a grin. "With me aboard, the two of us, between us, ought to bust the jinx."

"She's been abused, that's all," said Felton, fearing that even Johnny Rice might refuse the berth. "There's nothing wrong with her and we'll pay you the steel boat scale. I want to get her out the first of the week, Johnny, when can you come aboard?"

"Tomorrow morning," replied Johnny Rice, "or tonight, if you like."

"The sooner the better, as far as we are concerned. Your pay starts today, then," declared Felton. "You'll have to pick up your own crew."

That very night Captain Johnny Rice of the steamer *Philip Swain* began picking up his crew. He went first into Mother Reagan's barroom at an hour when he knew he'd find Tom Carter and Willie Larson together and mellow in their cups. In fact he chose the hour that he might find them not too sober and yet not too drunk. He needed a couple of mates and he knew they would fill the bill once they were safely aboard ship and away from Mother Reagan's "forty rod."

It required all of the diplomacy at his command, which he finally cinched at the proper time, with an appeal to their patriotism to do their part in the country's work, to secure their promise. But as it happened they were just ripe for an appeal to do their bit for their Uncle Sam in the merchant marine of the Great Lakes.

They insisted strongly at first that he bring the old shoe up to Mother Reagan's they they might have a good look over her, but once they agreed to be with him, Captain Johnny knew the deal was closed. Tom Carter and Willie Larson never broke their word with him.

He had a harder task with old Harvey Goulder, who had quit drinking too late to save him from the fate of pulling the throttle on a fish tug. But Johnny Rice knew and every other marine man knew that old Harvey Goulder, with his big tonnage papers, was a wizard of a chief engineer. He knew also that old Harvey was not getting on very well with the salary his fish-tug job paid, and that the scale on a steel boat was likely to look pretty good to the old Scotsman and to the old lady in the house which was falling to pieces around them.

"What boat is it?" asked old Harvey, suspiciously sitting on the edge of his chair in the sitting-room with cracked paper on the walls.

"The *Philip Swain*," admitted Johnny Rice, with a gulp in his throat.

"That old corpse!" exclaimed the old man. "So they've dug her up out o' the grave, too, eh? She's not turned a wheel for years."

"But she's a big ship and well built, Harvey," ventured the skipper. "She's never been given half a show."

"With a machine that was a wreck when it was built," commented Goulder. "She went through herself twice the first season out.

"I made a trip to Buffalo in her once and I watched that old engine dance around the engine-room the whole trip. Then I went ashore in Buffalo and got drunk and I wasn't around when she was ready to leave. I thought that drunk had saved my life, and you could have knocked me over when I heard she got back to Chicago without the machine walkin' out of the gangway."

Old Harvey Goulder smoked his pipe vigorously and stared at the cracked wall-paper. It would have been hard to follow his thoughts, perhaps, but at the end of his dream he turned his fiery old eyes on Johnny Rice and glared at him from under his white-fringed brows.

"You and me are in about the same fix," he remarked, slowly. "We aint been in the swim much lately, have we, Johnny? I don't see why we shouldn't take a chance on our old hides and get some of the surplus the Superior Line's goin' to pull out o' the high freights. If the old wagon goes under with us, she goes, that's all and we might's well end up that way as starve to death here ashore. You've got nobody, and the old woman'd be better off without me."

WITH young Hughie McGregor, his nephew, who had just passed his examination for his second's papers, as his assistant, Harvey Goulder was pounding and pulling at the *Swain's* running-gear early the next morning. Little by little the crew of the steamer was pieced together. Firemen from Donovan's and Mother Reagan's with their duffle on their backs, and watchmen and oilers and deck-hands, the flotsam of the human sea, came aboard, one by one. They were kicked at and sworn at by big Tom Carter, sick of his mate's job and keeping full of whisky to forget his disgrace, and fed on the grub thrown at them by a cook who was hiding away from the Army.

"I've a fine crew here," mused Johnny Rice, when he stood on the bridge at last, ready to pull the stand-by whistle. "They're a fine bunch to run this old ark light to the head of Lake Superior this time of the year."

"But, Lord knows I'm runnin' no bigger chance with them than they are with me," he sighed.

Swinging out from the dock with her big rusty hull high in the water, the ungainly ship caught the current of the stream just at the wrong moment and swirling around until her stern line snapped, she crashed into the side of the old schooner, *Sunset*, across the channel. As she slowly backed away the rusty steel bow slipped out of a jagged hole in the wooden side of the sailing craft. Gradually the *Sunset* began to settle lower and lower like an animal which had received its death blow, until her deck was awash.

"That's the first one," exclaimed Johnny. "If that's the beginning, we're goin' to have a fine time of it before we get to Lake Superior."

Down in the engine-room Harvey felt the shock as he jumped to respond to the backing signal.

"Lord bless us!" he cried. "Captain Jinx is beginnin' early. The poor devil! No man's ever been chased as hard by a hoodoo as him."

When at last the *Swain* steamed out of the harbor that early Fall morning, the superintendent breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, he's away at last," he remarked grimly to the old port captain, who stood beside him. "I'm glad he didn't leave his mark on anything but the old *Sunset*. Funny, aint it, the luck he has?"

"The *Swain* always was a bad one to handle," responded the port captain. "And with nothing in her she's worse than a big basket in the wind. I'm not envying him his run light to Lake Superior. With the ore in her coming down, she will handle better if she don't swamp."

Up Lake Michigan to the Straits of Mackinac steamed the *Swain* with the seas from the westward rolling her slimy old bottom up to the sun. Old Harvey Goulder down below, watched the big engine dance at a lively pace, and sweated the beer and booze out of his firemen keeping steam to give her speed. With all of her shortcomings it must be said that the *Swain* had the legs. With all of its clanging and clattering and its threats to fall apart, her engine could drive her at a good fifteen-mile clip providing the boilers could be coaxed into holding the steam.

Through the straits she sped into St. Mary's River with her luck still holding good. But Captain Johnny Rice faced suspension every minute for exceeding the speed permitted in the channel by Uncle Sam. Flashing along, with her bilge water shooting far out from her shanky side, she swung the bends in the river like the most delicate motor-car, answering her helm with a fidelity that was almost uncanny.

"She scares me, sor!" commented the wheelsman up through the swearing-box to the skipper. "She's that angelic that I fear she's figurin' on something devilish later on. Sure, I've wheeled her before, sor, and I know that there were times when I'd swore on me oath that there was nothing on the other end of these wheel chains."

"Make the best of her while she's behavin', Murphy," cautioned the skipper. "Remember, we're gettin' to the Soo. Look out for the locks!"

"I'm rememberin', sor, and I'm rememberin' that if there is anything within a mile of her, she'll hit it, too."

Going through the locks the *Swain* did nothing more serious than scrape the concrete walls so viciously that the officers ashore swore vigorously at the skipper and threatened to report him for carelessness. In the wheelhouse, Murphy ground his teeth and fairly hung to the wheel.

"The dirty devil!" he growled. "She's human and downright mean, that's what she is!"

Below in the engine-room Harvey Goulder stood a watch with his young nephew, standing with his hand on the throttle and his pipe clenched between his teeth.

"I'll not be easy until we get her out into open water again, boy," was his comment. "She needs room and speed to be safe."

A lucky star seemed to be hovering over the old *Philip Swain*, as she locked through the canal, and Johnny Rice rang up the engine-room as soon as he was clear, with the welcome signal to Goulder to give her all she had once more. Out past the White Fish Point light, she foamed with a howling nor'easter blowing behind her. The gale increased and with it the *Swain* added to her speed, with the big seas rolling up and hissing under her lifting stern.

It was blowing great guns outside of the point and the *Swain* riding high in the water, pitched heavily into the great hollows which raced up behind her and overtook her. Clouds of black smoke poured from her funnel and streamed out far ahead of her, spreading like a fan over the huge greenish combers. Wrapped in his ulster, Captain Johnny Rice clung to the bridge rail.

"Good thing she's runnin' before it," he told himself. "Standin' up out of water like this, the old tub couldn't do much with a head sea."

DAY and night the gale kept up as the *Swain* plugged along at her tremendous clip. The skipper with but a wink of sleep now and then in his room in the Texas, had remained almost continually on the bridge. In the engine-room Harvey Goulder dozed by bits in his armchair, to start up each time the seas smashed hard under the stern with a metallic crash. As the *Swain* neared Keweenaw Point, jutting out for miles into Lake Superior, with its copper-laden rocks, the skipper and his chief met at supper.

"Are you goin' through the canal?" asked Harvey Goulder. "There's probably a big sea off the point, with this wind."

"Sea or no sea," asserted Johnny Rice. "I'm going to keep outside if she ships the seas through the smoke stack. There's nothing coming down the lake against this weather and there's no danger of fetching up against anything when she's got the whole lake to herself."

"I'm glad to hear it," declared Goulder. "It's room and speed she needs to make her behave. I'd rather take a chance with her going full speed outside, if she does bob like a cork, than to be hittin' each side o' the canal goin' through. There's probably a hundred boats in Mud Lake and she'd have a fine time buntin' into 'em all and smashin' their plates for 'em."

A great idea seemed to form in Johnny Rice's mind and he smiled for the first time since he had left the Soo.

"Right you are, Harvey!" he cried. "Right you are, by Gad!"

When the morning came with a streaky light in the sky the *Swain* was doing some great performance off the point. As the light broadened Captain Rice could see the rocky headland standing out against the milky spray, beating at its base. Fully three miles ahead and off his port bow, Captain Johnny Rice was astounded to see a big steamer wallowing in the seas. Without comment, he focused his glasses upon her.

She was low in the water, evidently loaded with ore, and the seas were foaming over her decks, amidships. As the skipper of the *Swain* studied her through the glasses, he saw four jets of steam rise from her siren, and although the sound of the whistle was lost in the storm, he knew that she was calling for assistance.

"She's in trouble!" he shouted to Carter, the mate who was standing the watch on the bridge with him. "And she's in a bad way there, driftin' up against that point. See what you make out of it, Carter."

The mate took the glasses and studied the stranger carefully.

"It's one of the Bessemer ore fellows. Looks like she had no headway at all, sir," he announced.

"We're not any too well off ourselves," said the skipper, "but if we could get near enough to do those poor devils any good, I'd try it. I hate to stand by and see them go under."

"You're the skipper, sir," declared Carter. "I'm with you in whatever you do. This old shoe's hard to handle and we stand a chance o' losin' her."

"It wouldn't be much loss to the company," said the skipper. "But I don't want to dump this gang into Lake Superior, without givin' 'em a chance. We've got to do something quick if we do it at all. We'll give it a try, anyway, and if the old tin box piles up on the rocks, it'll have to stand against my soul."

Plunging along like a race-horse with the foam flecking her sides, the *Swain* bore down upon the distressed steamer, keeping to the windward of her to avoid the narrowing space between the disabled craft and the rocks. As the *Swain* approached, the name *Thomas Benton*, *Buffalo*, in rounded gold letters stood out visibly on the stern.

Within thirty feet of the *Benton's* stern Johnny Rice rang to Goulder to check down. The *Swain* was just coming abreast of the helpless craft when she felt the slackening of speed and almost instantly she began to perform. Her helm spun helplessly and the rolling combers sent her swirling down upon the *Benton*. With a crash and a shudder which caused the skipper and the mate to cling fast to the bridge rail the two boats came together broadside in the roaring sea.

Down in the engine-room old Harvey Goulder picked himself up from the floor and rubbed a sore elbow.

"What the blazes has Captain Jinx hit now, out here in the middle of Lake Superior!" he shouted, angrily.

Young McGregor bounded up the safety ladder to the main deck as Goulder scrambled back to the throttle. Within a few moments the second engineer came rushing back with his eyes popping.

"We're layin' up 'longside a big fellow that's in a bad way," he announced. "And they're heavin' a line aboard of her. I heard her skipper yell to Johnny that she'd broken her shaft and was driftin' on the rocks."

With his announcement came the clang of the gong. The telegraph indicator spun around to the signal, "Full speed ahead!" Harvey gave her all she had and the old *Swain* creaked and strained under the drag of the laden craft she had taken in tow. But the straining was short lived. Suddenly the *Swain* seemed to leave the water in a headlong dash forward and speed ahead like a hound freed from a leash.

"There's one rotten line gone," commented Goulder. "If we have the usual luck it'll be in our wheel in a minute."

From the bridge Captain Johnny Rice saw the line let go and he groaned with disappointment.

"Might have known it wouldn't go right," he growled between clenched teeth. "Things never did for me and they never will, I guess. Rotten old line like everything else on board this outfit! We'll have to do it all over again."

"Carter!" he called out. "Get out every

heavin' line aboard the ship and splice 'em all together somehow! Maybe they've got something on the *Benton* that'll hold, if we can get a heavin' line aboard."

With the wallowing *Benton* far astern and still drifting slowly inshore toward the rocks, the *Philip Swain* began swinging around in a wide arc to avoid wracking as much as possible. But as she fell into the trough of the mountaineous seas, the rushing greenish combers threatened to roll her clear over.

Everything loose swept across her decks with a roar as she lurched down and then went racing back as she rolled the other way. The seas struck her steel sides and the spray broke completely over her in white clouds, leaving her slimy bottom visible clear to the keel. At last in a perfect cataract of foam she swung her nose into the seas and pitched violently, fore and aft.

FOR more than an hour she battled on against the wind and the seas until every window in her pilothouse was shattered clean from its sash, and Mike Murphy, who was at the helm, stood drenched and shivering at the wheel, his face and hands bleeding from a dozen cuts.

But the *Benton* was astern again on the starboard side when the *Swain* began to repeat her contortions in the trough of the sea, as Murphy put her about again. And with the seas behind her once more, every one on board the *Swain* breathed a little sigh of relief, along with a prayer of thanksgiving, perhaps. At any rate the *Swain* picked up her headway rapidly and bore down again upon the disabled *Benton*.

For once things seemed about to turn out as Captain Johnny Rice figured they should. Fortunately the progress of the ore-laden *Benton* toward the rocky shore line had been slow. The seas had swept over her continually but her heavy, bulky hull, low in the water, resisted the drive like a water-soaked log.

As she drifted slowly into shallower water off the point, she let go her anchors as a last hope and the rocky bottom furnished a catch for them. The chains strained and tugged and clanged with the roll of the boat, but they held, though the sweeping seas threatened constantly to break the grip of the anchors on the bottom.

With an audacity which astounded himself, Johnny Rice drove the *Swain* full speed into the channel between the *Benton* and the rocks. So close was the speeding ship to the outlying rocks of the point that the roar of the breakers sounded in the skipper's ears above the howl of the wind. But the *Swain* drove forward as true as a die to her helm.

A grim smile of satisfaction spread over Johnny Rice's face. He had solved the secret of mastery of the hoodoo ship, and his great idea had worked out successfully. Under strong headway the *Swain* would handle with the accuracy of a racing yacht. Without it she was as helpless as a craft without a rudder.

Just at the right time Carter, stationed on the after cabin, sent the thin black heaving line twisting through space and as it landed with a thud on the wet deck of the *Benton*, a desperate sailor from that ship sprawled over it, emerging from a sea which buried him at the same time, with the line clasped firmly in his hands. Like a madman he rushed forward with it and with lightning fingers he made it fast in the bight of the stout cable which was waiting there. The skipper of the *Benton* appeared to have read the mind of Captain John Rice.

Several hundred feet of heaving line, spliced together, had spun out from the *Swain* as she passed the *Benton* at express speed. Then she slackened up to save the strain which would come when the heavy cable came dripping and twisting through the sea like a long, thin snake. And when it was aboard at last and made fast around the drum of the big windlass in the *Swain's* stern, the big siren roared out a triumphant signal. The cable straightened out under the strain, and the screw of the *Swain* sent the water rumbling away from her stern.

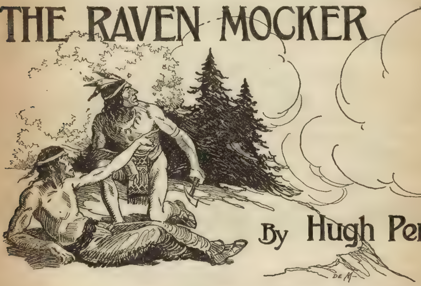
On board the *Benton*, the anchor hoists rattled and deck engines coughed rapidly. Quickly the great folding anchors which had saved her were torn from their grip on the rocks below, and the deep-laden ship began to slip forward, slowly and uncertainly at first and then more steadily with increasing speed. Her prow swung outward as the *Swain* pulled her away from the rocks and destruction. As the *Benton* plunged forward under the steady pull, a deep blast from her whistle informed the *Swain* of her safety in a language stronger than the victorious shouts of men.

IT WAS a long dreary drag to Duluth, but the gale had blown itself out when the *Swain* pulled into the outer harbor with the *Benton* plowing at the end of a long tow line behind her. A tug came rolling out to relieve her of her burden and the *Swain* went on alone up the channel, bumping a dock, here and there, to maintain her reputation.

Captain Johnny Rice stumbled ashore as soon as she landed and remained long enough to wire a report of the affair to Felton. Then he went back aboard and rolled into his bunk, without removing his clothes. When he awakened twenty hours later, the lake country from Buffalo to Port Arthur, was ablaze with the press yarns of his performance, and Carter was nearly frantic in his effort to keep the marine reporters from breaking in upon the skipper's slumbers.

Felton's telegram was the first thing to catch Captain Johnny Rice's eye as he rolled out of his berth and he tore open the yellow envelope with a quick yank to see if he had been relieved of his command for his foolishness. However, a sleepy smile forced itself into his countenance as he read:

> Great! You've busted the jinx. Come home by rail.
> Have something here for you.



THE RAVEN MOCKER

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Skidi Feed the Evening Star," "A New Keeper of the Wampum," etc.

DOWN the Great War Trail that threaded all the country east of the Mississippi together in peace and war sped Yanegwa, "Big Bear," returning from the home of the Iroquois to the Upper Towns of the Cherokee Nation on the Tennessee. The Upper Towns had expected an embassy of old and experienced warriors to undertake the mission in this Autumn of 1738. But in the great council held at Echota, the capital and peace town, the priests spent a day in studying the great talismanic crystal and reported it was always the figure of the young warrior that floated to the top. So he "went to the water" to purify himself by bathing. For ten days he drank the peace medicine and then got eagle feathers.

Having completed these preliminaries, the belt was put around him and his talk tied up in a bundle, and he set forth with instructions to proceed, if need be, to the ancient home of the Mohawks in the far North, near the place where the sky vault was constantly rising and falling to crush those who presumed to venture beyond the horizon's rim.

It had not been necessary for him to visit the Mohawk country, however, as representatives of that tribe were gathered at the Great Council Fire of the Five Nations at Onondaga, the League's seat of government. It was the proudest moment of his life when he addressed that illustrious assemblage, Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida and Cayuga. No warrior's triumph could equal his thrill of joy as he produced the bag his talk was in and opened it.

When he made the symbolic fire of dry elm, the light of which should be a beacon to all tribes, he felt close kinship with the gods. When he stripped the white hickory bark, that the fire might be moved on it from place to place and illumine all dark corners of the league, the approbation of the silent warriors stole over him like incense. With impressive dignity he presented the wampum, showing one dish and one spoon, signifying all tribes should eat together in amity. With great eloquence he proclaimed his people's desire to bury the hatchet so deep no warrior of either nation could ever dig it up again.

In concluding he had said:

"Blood has been spilled and must be wiped up clean. Bones have been scattered and must be collected and buried and covered with white bark. Come fearlessly to the Eldest Brother of the Nation (Echota) and you will always find the white benches in place and the great white peace pipe with its seven stems leaning against them. The white wampum now hangs between the Iroquois and my people. The talk I have given I leave with you to give to other tribes, who shall come to learn what means the fire I have lighted."

And he received peace belts in return and set out for home, conscious he had done well and stood high in the esteem of the fierce Northern tribes, kinsmen and ancient enemies of the Cherokee.

His exaltation abided with him till he crossed the Potomac. Now that he was nearing home and bringing momentous news to the elders each eager stride should have added to his climax of joy. But as he pressed on through the blazing glory of Autumnal woods he was dismayed to find a vague unrest disturbing his mind. The War Trail, which his eloquence and bearing had turned into a Path of Peace, began to oppress him. The red blush of the maples suggested blood. He sought to diagnose this morbid fancy, and instantly imagination began working and hinting at an unknowable yet impending evil.

Such a mental attitude was preposterous, reason told him—unless it be the malignant work of a wizard or witch. That it might be the natural reaction from a too long sustained pitch of thought never entered his calculations. White men as well as red believed in witches and demons. The very fact such notions could enter his head at such a time was proof positive some malicious agency was working against him. But wizards and ghosts usually work through a human medium, and there came a day when he completely surrendered to the strange obsession and left the trail and doubled far back to satisfy himself the Iroquois had not broken the faith by sending warriors after him.

Ordinarily such a fear would be absurd, for the talk given and received at Onondaga was sacred. He was as safe among the Five Nations as in his own home. But evil spirits work through unsuspected channels, and the instinct to guard against a stealthy menace was overwhelming. A second incredible situation developed when he discovered he was confused as to his exact whereabouts.

Such a ridiculous predicament could only result from the work of the Little People, who live in hollow trees and caves and whose malice is confined to befuddling tried warriors. He found the trail at sunset and camped for the night, still undecided as to which particular demon the Little Folks were allied with. As he brooded over the enigma a star left its position and streamed away to the horizon, showing it was no star at all, but a Fire-Panther. What it boded he could not imagine.

Early next morning he was afoot, the calm of the never-ending forest pressing upon him like the walls of a tent. The occasional chatter of a tree-squirrel only accented the silence. Once a chipmunk ran up to him and he saluted it gravely and accepted it as a sign of good luck. For the Chipmunk was friendly to man. He was clawed by a bear in a council of the animals because he had dared to speak a good word for men, and his stripes are a constant reminder of that loyalty.

Far above the forest crown sounded the faint *dugalu dugalu dugalu* of the white-breasted geese migrating south. Big Bear envied them for their ease and swiftness of flight and the wide spaces through which they traveled with never a fear of an ambush.

As he followed his trail of yesterday he marveled at the careless marks his moccasins had left. Now he was moving like a shadow and often examined the priming of his gun. The lofty sentiments expressed at Onondaga seemed to be far back in the past. He had his bag of peace talk and white wampum, but they were powerless to oust the suspicion that some evil was stalking him. Once a wolf startled him by crossing the trail. He raised his gun and all but fired before recognizing the gray streak. He was very glad his eyes had not completely tricked him, for wolves are the watch-dogs of Kanati, the Lucky Hunter, and it spoils a gun to shoot at one.

Midday found his superstitious mind taking a new twist; he was loath to advance, although he had not reached the point where he had quit the trail to double back. The consciousness of danger no longer emanated from the rear, and, seemingly, there was no logic in his tarrying. He recognized this, but decided some sort of an ambush awaited him down the trail. If he waited a bit the ambush would be lifted.

So again he camped with only half a day's journey completed, and that night Wahuhu, the screech owl, began talking, and with feminine persistency shouted the same message over and over without giving him an opportunity to ask any questions. Other night-birds, through whom the ghosts talk, joined in and derided him, but he could discover no clue. A priest would have learned the truth from them.

On resuming his journey in the morning he took a new tack with his mind. He firmly told himself—

"I will think of nothing but my Sister, Little Feather, who dances like the sunbeams and sings like the red bird."

And so long as he crowded his mind with thoughts of Little Feather and her winsome sweetness he was at peace.

But concentration has its limits, and he found himself declaring he was not afraid of any enemy he could see. Nor did he fear death. It was the inexplicable that disturbed him and weakened his blood. He wondered if by chance he had eaten the flesh of a timid animal while among the Iroquois. He knew he would be what he ate. He had seen warriors become slow and clumsy because they partook of waka, the cow.

ALL these meditations were abruptly terminated as through an opening in the forest the sun cast a vertical spear of light into the trail, and caused his gaze to become fierce and objective. The dazzling light brought out in strong relief the signs of a trail entering the war path from the west. The marks were fresh and it was following the trail he had made two days back. By doubling toward the north he had unwittingly placed the tracker before him. He quickened his pace to maintain his advantage.

Doubtless it was a Shawnee, that tribe being implacable in their hate since the Cherokee drove them north of the Ohio and wrested the Kentucky country from them. This evidence of a tangible foe turned Big Bear into a man-hunter.

Here was the explanation of his unwillingness to advance a full day's journey yesterday. The Fire-Panther was this stealthy assassin. With his mind satisfied on these points he shifted his gun to his left hand and drew his ax. He preferred the ax, although it came from the store-room of Bridge, the trader, who had debauched many young braves of the nation with his strong rum. Only one fear now remained; that the newcomer would discover where he left the trail and understand his quarry was behind, not before, him. But the next bend in the ancient path brought him in sight of the tracker.

He glided noiselessly forward, his ax upraised, and sharply yelled—

"*Ku!* (Now!)"

With a snarl the figure straightened and wheeled, and Big Bear was nonplussed to recognize a Cherokee from the Lower Towns, who had taken to living at the white man's fort near the Cherokee settlement on Big Pigeon River.

"The Whistler!" exclaimed Big Bear, his arm falling to his side. "Did you think you were following a Shawnee?"

The Whistler came toward him, saying—

"It is Yanegwa, returned from the Great Council Fire of the Iroquois."

Big Bear smiled amiably. The Whistler was very welcome, for his presence proved the Fire-Panther was a liar and that Wahuhu had nothing but old woman's talk to tell. Some evil spirit had sought to trap him and had failed. Yet he could not resist jibing—

"The Whistler has lived with the whites so long and drank so much of their strong water his eyes have grown dim, or he would have known a Shawnee would not leave a trail a cow could follow."

The Whistler drew back his lips in a little snarl, his eyes glowing. He knew his kinsmen viewed him with contempt because of his continued association with the whites. But English rum was fiery and had bought many a better man than he. As he drew very close Big Bear caught the taint of his breath and stepped back. The delinquent's presence seemed to poison the cool, clean woods.

"I knew I was following Yanegwa's trail," said the Whistler, advancing.

Big Bear laughed.

"Were my people troubled about me? Did they send the brave Whistler to find me? Why was he bending over my tracks as though following a war trail?"

"He followed Yanegwa to kill him!" hissed the Whistler, striking with his knife.

Although taken completely off his guard Big Bear's instinct of self-preservation asserted itself automatically. The ax he was replacing in his belt was jerked upward a few inches and the knife glanced from the flat side of the head.

Instantly the two clinched, clutching each other's right wrists. Much rum and soft living, however, had made the Whistler flabby, and as they fell to the ground Big Bear secured the advantage. Even then he would have spared his assailant, thinking him bereft of his senses; but as he loosened his grip the knife leaped upward. At the cost of a slashed wrist Big Bear caught it and violently forced it downward.

Coughing hideously, and done for, the Whistler relaxed. In sorrow and disgust Big Bear stared at the crumpled figure. Far overhead came an eery sound, the note of a raven "diving," and not at all resembling the raven's usual cry. Both Indians recognized it as the voice of Kalanu Ahyeliski, the Raven Mocker, that terrible wizard or witch that hovers over the sick and dying to rob them of life. It usually flies through the heavens in fiery shape and all other witches and demons scatter at its approach; jealous yet afraid of it. It was no Fire-Panther that Big Bear had seen, but the Raven Mocker hurrying to be in at a death.

"Kalanu Ahyeliski!" gasped the Whistler, staring wildly up into the forest tops. "Keep it away!"

"I have no medicine," shivered Big Bear.

"Stay with me, or the Mocker will eat my heart. If you stay it may keep away. If you bury me quick it can not get me."

"I have no medicine," repeated Big Bear, fighting mightily to overcome his impulse to flee.

"You come from a great peace talk; that may be medicine. You have floated in the magic crystal; that must be medicine."

"I can not help you," shuddered Big Bear.

For he knew the Raven Mocker, being invisible, even then might be standing at his side. He expected to behold the Whistler's body leap into the air as the demon seized it.

"Stay!" panted The Whistler. "Bridge sent me—to kill you. Little——"

The death-rattle cut him short.

Dazed by the horror of it all Big Bear could only remember that the Raven Mocker could not violate a grave. He frantically scooped out a hollow in the forest mold and covered up the dead man. Then he ran as though pursued by a legion of demons. Not till far into the night did his mind clear and permit him to think connectedly. The Whistler's dying words had lodged fast in his brain and now demanded attention. He reviewed them and found them incredible. Why should Bridge, autocrat though he was, seek the life of a bearer of belts, a man he had scarcely seen? Yet how could a man in his death throes and while the Raven Mocker crouched at his side speak with a forked tongue?

IT WAS early evening when Big Bear halted at the Big Pigeon and gazed long at the Great Smoky range. One peak in particular had his reverence, Kuwahi, "the mulberry place." There, White Bear, chief of all the bears, lived near the enchanted lake of Atagahi, where wounded bears went to bathe and be cured of their hurts. The Cherokee knew that beyond their physical structure there was little difference between animals and men. In fact, the bear was part human as shown by his habit of standing erect.

In the old days they had worked and lived together. Like the Indians the animals had their tribes and elected chiefs. They had their town houses, where they held councils. They shared with man the same destiny in the Twilight Land of Usunhiyi.

On the lower slopes a ribbon of red was crawling upward, writhing like a gigantic snake, where the women and children were burning the dead leaves to get the nuts underneath. Big Bear had been homesick for such sights ever since traveling to the North country. No water could ever taste like the water from the Big Pigeon, no nights so mellow and starry as those over the Great Smoky. And yet the mumbled words of a would-be assassin had poisoned Big Bear's home-coming.

The sinister problem was ever worrying him. He had nothing Bridge could want. The trader was a friend of officers at the fort and gambled and drank with them and loaned them money. He had nothing in common with the Cherokee Nation, his relations being confined to exchanging poor guns and strong rum for dressed deerskins and other articles of barter.

Big Bear had seen him many times, a heavily-built man showing the effects of gross living. But he did not believe Bridge knew him by sight. The trader seldom visited the Cherokee towns these days, having reached a plane of affluence. He had a plantation and trading-house near the fort and transacted his business there. Much of his time was spent in carousing with the officers. No; it could not be as The Whistler had said. The Whistler had lost his reason from fear of the Raven Mocker. He had spoken crazy words.

Determined to accept this conclusion Big Bear resumed his journey, eager to be welcomed by Little Feather. As he ran up the river path he discerned a tall figure approaching at a swift pace. Anywhere between the Ohio and Savannah he would have recognized that loping gait; and he joyously called out:

"The Path-Killer! I come, Yanegwa."

The Path-Killer fairly skimmed over the trail to embrace him, but Big Bear's heart grew cold with a premonition of disaster as his sworn friend gripped him by the shoulders and spoke never a word of welcome.

"What is it?" whispered Big Bear, pushing his friend back and seeking to read his face through the gloom.

"I prayed the mighty Adawehi would tell you. I can not. Ask me of those you love and I will answer. But it takes the life out of me," choked The Path-Killer.

"Little Feather?" muttered Big Bear, the fingers of death squeezing his heart.

The Path-Killer took his arm and swung him about and pointed to the west, where a faint touch of pink was left behind by the sun.

"She is there," he whispered.

"She has gone to Usunhiyi," moaned Big Bear.

"To Usunhiyi—'Where-It-Is-Ever-Growing-Dark'—The Twilight Land."

"When did she die?"

"Seven nights ago. Little Feather! Little Feather!" And with a groan of anguish the Path-Killer stretched out his arms to the spirit land, where go the dead.

"She was well when I went away. What sickness came to our people?"

The Path-Killer became a warrior, burning for vengeance, as he harshly replied:

"She fell or jumped off the high ledge near the fort while escaping from Bridge, the trader. He stole her and took her to his house but she escaped. He and his men gave chase."

"Bridge—sent me—to kill you. *Little*——"

Big Bear now understood The Whistler's dying words.

He held up his ax and kissed the blade and in a calm voice asked—

"Who were with Bridge?"

"Two officers and two of his workmen. I have killed the workmen. The others are hard to get at."

"May the Raven Mocker be near when they die, which must be very soon," prayed Big Bear over the ax.

"I have stalked them close, but they either stay at the fort or shut themselves up at the plantation," sighed the Path-Killer. "They know something is on their trail. They dare not go about. The council would send a force against them but I made the chiefs wait till you could come."

"It is not work for any but Yanegwa, her brother, and the man whose wife she was to be. There shall never be white wampum between me and the white settlers."

THE trader always had considered Indians as inferior animals; to be exploited for gain, or exterminated if they got in the way. That they experienced the gamut of human emotions never entered his head. Little Feather, an uncommonly attractive Indian girl, had appealed to his brutal fancy the moment his bloodshot gaze beheld her. She had repulsed his brusk advances. But possession had simply meant the taking; so he called in two of his officer cronies to participate in the lark, and gave orders to his henchmen. That the wench should spoil his sport by escaping and falling or jumping to her death was a fault he should always hold against the whole Cherokee Nation. He declared as much over his glass as he sat with his friends and discussed the tragedy.

The finding of one of his employees dead the day following the girl's death turned him into a fiend and he swore in horrible oaths the punishment he would mete out. The discovery of the second dead body ten hours later suggested that some one had started a system of accumulative revenge and weakened his ferocity. He was not accustomed to meet those who struck back.

He drank much raw rum in brooding over the second death and had worked himself into a mental state bordering on a panic when his two friends rode over from the fort to take action on the double killing. They were for calling out the soldiers and raiding the town. But Bridge dissented.

"That would start another war and stop my profits," he moodily grunted. "Keep quiet. I'll see some of the headmen and fix it up. It'll cost a pretty bale of cloth, but better that than to stir up the whole nation."

"Perhaps they've let enough blood to square it," hopefully suggested Finsin, a rat-eyed heir of a wealthy planter.

"Two dead men ought to be enough for any Injun woman on the continent," growled Bursen, whose impudence and daring supplied the place of a rich father. "Curse them for a devilish breed! If the Government would pay a decent price for their hair we'd clean them up inside a year. Massachusetts has been paying a hundred pounds for a scalp. Godfrey! What pickings! Put that price on down here, Bridge, and I'll have pounds to your shillings and pay what I owe you to boot."

Bridge studied his glass morosely as he said:

"Wish it could be settled without a fuss. Got to have Injuns to make profits. You'd better quarter a score of your soldiers over here. My men are getting silly—some of them got Injun women who fill them up with their —— ghost yarns."

"I'll detail some men for outpost duty here," readily agreed Bursen. Then raising his glass he mockingly cried, "Speaking of ghosts, here's to the hussy that was fool enough to prefer the river to your caresses."

"Don't!" shouted the trader. "That is; I'm unstrung."

"I should say you are," jeered Finsin, eying him in surprise. "What's a dead Injun?"

Bridge rose and examined the fastenings of the heavily-barred shutters. He was conscious of his companions' curious scrutiny as he returned to the table and fell into his chair.

"I'm shut up here alone except when you chaps call," he muttered. "Gits on my nerves—that and the rum. Can't help hearing the Injun women's talk—creepy."

"As to what?" urged Bursen, winking at his companion.

Bridge started to pour out a drink, paused and spilled the liquor on the table and raised a hand for attention. It was a weird night sound.

"Owl," mumbled Finsin. "Think it was a war-whoop?"

"The wench come back to haunt you," maliciously suggested Bursen.

"Neither ghosts nor war-whoops can make my hand shake like that," hoarsely assured Bridge, holding up his heavy hand and studying the twitching fingers. "What'n —— do you suppose causes that? I ain't drunk. Ever hear them Injun yarns about the Raven Mocker?"

Bursen laughed loudly and demanded—"Who hasn't?"

He affected to speak in huge disgust, yet his glance traveled toward the window.

"They have a pleasant trick of eating the heart of the dying. Medicine-men coil the great invisible serpent 'round the house to keep them out. Even that isn't a sure remedy."

"Get two serpents," advised Finsin with a maudlin grin.

"Some things about their medicine we

whites don't understand," grunted Bridge.

"Some things about their Raven Mocker their priests don't understand," added Bursen. "In coiling the serpent the priest must leave an opening between the head and tail where you can go in and out. Otherwise the medicine isn't any good. And there's nothing to stop the Raven Mocker from entering through the gap. I've listened to that rot ever since I came to the Colonies."

"I'm in no mood to talk about it," mumbled Bridge. "Let's have the cards."

"I thank you, but no," refused Bursen, rising and bowing with exaggerated politeness. "Your amiable mood, worthy friend, would give you ——able luck. And I can't afford to lose any more just at present. Wish they'd offer a decent scalp bounty so us poor devils could get in funds. I'm for the fort. Coming, Finsin?"

Finsin looked longingly at the bottle. Bridge urged him to stay all night, but, not relishing to return alone in the morning, he muttered an oath and staggered to his feet. Bridge hurriedly gulped down a drink and swore he would accompany them and look for a game at the fort, but a recurrence of the night-cry suddenly dampened his enthusiasm and he gruffly bade them good night from the table.

After they had gone he felt uneasy and even imagined something was watching him through the oak shutters. He knew such spying was impossible but the notion persisted till he rang for his superintendent to keep him company. The superintendent eagerly assailed the bottle, content to sit in silence while his master brooded over the stubbornness of the Indian character.

"Why the devil don't you say something?" he finally roared. "Where's The Whistler?"

"Dead," was the laconic reply.

"Dead?" faintly screamed Bridge, bouncing to his feet.

"Lor', sir! I didn't 'low you'd be interested. He's only a Injun," meekly replied the superintendent. "Found dead on the Big War Trail. Been buried but some wild things had dug him out."

Bridge sank limply into his chair and endeavored to make his voice sound natural as he said—

"Prob'ly a Shawnee raiding band caught him."

The superintendent shook his head emphatically, saying:

"He had his hair. No Shawnee would 'a' left that. Seems to have been killed by his own knife, jest like he done for hisself. Mebbe he did."

"He didn't bury himself," whispered Bridge, wiping the water from his forehead. "What do the Cherokee think?"

The superintendent shifted uneasily; then retorted.

"They's a crazy lot. Wouldn't send a party out to scout around—seem to think the witches done it. Killed him and buried him so the Raven Mocker couldn't git him. They believe all the witches and devils are scared of the Raven Mocker and hate it so they'll bury a man jest out of spite. Now I 'low——"

"Shut up that cursed babbling!" cried Bridge, thumping the table. "Has Yanegwa got back yet?"

"Not yet, sir. He's overdue, too. The Path-Killer went to meet him. Path-Killer was sweet—erhum."

"Go on!"

"Well, he was sweet on Yanegwa's sister." This very apologetically.

"Huh!" exclaimed Bridge, his eyes glistening. Leaning over the table he hissed, "Fifty pounds for the Path-Killer's head. But it must be done quickly."

"Money's good as earned if he ever shows up," eagerly assured the superintendent. "I'll look for him in the morning. Hark! Some one's coming." And he rose and stepped to the window and threw open the shutter before Bridge could stop him.

Several of the servants were huddled in front of the house holding pine-knot torches. Down the trail beyond the cleared ground a voice was softly chanting. The night, the dancing shadows cast by the torches, the fear in his own mind, caused the trader to shiver as though cold. Yet he could not summon the will power to order the shutter closed. He had to stand there and glare out into the darkness and witness what was to happen. The chanting was scarcely audible, no words being distinguishable. Low and monotonous it kept on, drawing nearer and nearer. Then two vague shapes broke through the darkness and into the rim of the torch zone and came ambling up the driveway.

With a shrill laugh of relief the superintendent informed them:

"The officers, sir, merry from drink. I could tell their hosses anywhere. They've come back to make a night of it. They've stopped singing."

The horses made for the lights and the familiar doorway. The men below began exclaiming in horror and amazement as the torches revealed dead men lurching across the withers of their mounts. As they lifted them to the ground and straightened them out under the window Bridge gave a low cry of abject terror.

The superintendent feebly cried:

"Dead and not scalped—waistcoats cut to ribbons! Oh, Lor'! No witches was 'round to bury 'em in time!"

* * *

A DELEGATION of chiefs from the Cherokee town visited the fort and petitioned that a band of soldiers be sent with their young men after the marauding Shawnee to punish them for slaying The Whistler and the two officers. The commander assented and dispatched a body of scouts to cooperate with the warriors. But Bridge was confident no Shawnee would be overtaken on the Great War Trail.

So he remained closely guarded in his house, fear and rum his hourly companions. His superintendent obtained a small number of soldiers to reinforce the plantation guards, and these made merry in the cook-house or boisterously patrolled the grounds at night. The trader sat at the table, sometimes dozing off, more often awake and clutching the bottle and a pistol, and quaking at every sound. The days passed and nothing happened. Inquiries made through the Indian women frequenting the plantation elicited no news of Yanegwa or the Path-Killer. Their tribesmen believed both had been killed, said the women.

The superintendent accepted this theory. The two had been slain by the same warrior, or band, that killed The Whistler and the officers. The Shawnee had hoped to escape suspicion by refraining from scalping their victims. Probably there were but very few in the Shawnee band, and they hoped to hide in the cane and hills and pick off a victim now and then. Two Mohawk braves once remained hidden near one of the Lower Towns for a space of four moons and stealthily killed till the nation believed it to be the work of witches.

Satisfied the Path-Killer was dead the superintendent quietly murdered an Indian, represented it was Little Feather's lover, and collected his fifty pounds. Never had the trader paid out money so willingly. He was convinced Big Bear was dead, and the passing of the Path-Killer to the Twilight Land rolled a mighty load from his heart. With brutal jocosity he remarked, after paying over the blood-price—

"The three of them can talk things over."

"No doubt but what Big Bear's dead," murmured the superintendent.

The trader's eyes took alarm, and he said—

"If he ain't I'll give a hundred pounds for his head."

"I'll fetch in the heads of the whole nation at that rate," cried the superintendent.

* * *

HIDDEN in a small cave near some falls on the Big Pigeon, where the voice of the Thunderers spoke to them day and night in wise council, Big Bear and his friend essayed to devise a plan whereby they could come upon the trader when he was alone. Night after night they reconnoitered the house seeking an entrance. To avoid the drunken soldiers was child's play, but to gain admission to the trader's living-quarters without a great display of force seemed to be impossible.

There were times when they could have slain at a distance, providing their medicine was strong. These opportunities came each day when the trader stepped to the front door and whistled for his favorite horse. The intelligent animal was allowed to run free, his master's signal always bringing him to the house on the gallop. It was the one trait in the trader's brutal make-up that savored of humanism; he loved the horse.

These were the only occasions when he showed himself, and never then except as he was surrounded by his men and the soldiers. A long shot might bring him down, but such an anonymous killing would not satisfy the Cherokee. Both had sworn on Big Bear's ax that the trader should know his slayer and the cause of his death.

"It is talked in the village that he is killing himself with fear," said the Path-Killer.

"Fear is good but he must not die alone," replied Big Bear. "I would not have him die by his own hand. Little Feather's death was clean. His must be bloody."

"When he leaves the house we will follow and catch him unguarded," consoled the Path-Killer.

"But he never leaves his house. Each day I fear to hear he has killed himself, or died quietly in bed."

"He must leave some day. He will grow weary of being alone and will start for the fort. He will whistle to his horse and mount it and dart away with his men behind him. Some day he will come to the door, dressed for the trail. We must always be ready to follow."

"My brother speaks medicine words," softly exulted Big Bear. "He will watch the house tonight alone while I find the horse and make friends with him."

"Adawehi helps us!" cried the Path-Killer, his gaze lighting with inspiration. "May your medicine be mighty enough to call the horse to us when his master would ride him to the fort!"

Big Bear shook his head, saying:

"The priests might do it. The old people could do it, but not Yanegwa. He who can drive the Raven Mocker away could do it, but Yanegwa is only a warrior."

"Yanegwa's medicine is strong enough to drive the trader from his house," the Path-Killer insisted. "One of the corn women told me last night he is afraid of the Mocker. He does not believe it was a Shawnee who killed the officers. He believes it was a Mocker. All his men know his fears."

"He hired The Whistler to kill me," murmured Big Bear, his eyes blank as he groped for the big idea. "It was The Whistler who taught him to call his horse by whistling. He fears the Raven Mocker. *Ku!* I know it now. Our medicine shall drive him into the open. I, Yanegwa, who carried the bundle of peace talk to the Five Nations, say it!"

STRANGE talk was whispered about the plantation, much of which seeped into the master's apartment and set him to shivering. It was said many Raven Mockers were hovering 'round the place. Their cries could be heard each night. Some life must soon go out to attract such numbers of the wizards. Lesser witches and devils, in the shape of black clouds, had been seen retreating over the Great Smoky Mountains, frightened from their mediocre mischief by the Mockers.

"Such —— rot," mumbled Bridge, after pumping his superintendent about the cook-house gossip. "Keep them women off the plantation. What's the matter with you? You look silly 'round the gills."

"It's their ghost yarns, sir. It's all I've heard for a week."

"The Path-Killer's spirit after you, eh?" And the trader grinned wolfishly in thinking he had a companion in fear. "What do those women say about the priests keeping the Raven Mockers away? Not that there's anything in it. Yet we don't understand just what the priests can do."

"They coil a big serpent about a house, but have to leave an opening between the head and tail——"

"Shut up! Bursen was talking that guff—the night he was done for. Curse this country and its silly tales! Get things ready for me to go to the fort."

"Hoke can run things while we're gone," eagerly suggested the superintendent, who believed a trip to the fort might ease his thoughts of the Indian he had murdered.

"While *we're* gone?" scoffed the trader. "Who the devil are you, anyway? Drinking out the same bottle don't make us equals, my man. You'll stick here."

After the superintendent sullenly took his departure the trader outlined his plans. He would hire a new superintendent, and then go North and keep clear of the witch-ridden country. He regretted he had not gone to the fort before. Cautiously unfastening the shutters he peered out at the west and whispered:

"Usunhiyi. Where-It-Is-Always-Growing-Dark—I didn't send the little fool there. Besides, we were all drunk."

That night employees, soldiers and hangers-on heard a Raven Mocker over the house; not one voice, but many. There was no sleep in the help's quarters; there was no sleep in the master's apartment. The weird cries circled the plantation, now sounding in the depths of the forest, now calling from the tilled fields and outhouses. And toward morning it rang with ear-splitting violence close to the shuttered window and brought the trader to his feet, the dew of death on his flabby face. Sunrise found him fully dressed but helpless from liquor.

He came to his senses late in the afternoon and remembered the experiences of the night. He could not pass through such another night. Shaking and trembling he dragged himself from bed and rang for the superintendent.

"I'm leaving for the fort as soon as I can get my papers in order. Have the soldiers ready and six of my best woodsmen."

"Shall the men catch your hoss?"

"They'd have a fine run for it. I'll call the horse when I'm ready. Git out!"

The Twilight Land had reluctantly surrendered its last bit of gold and the steel-blue of the mountains had changed to sullen gray before the trader finished arranging his papers. Bursen's I. O. U.'s went into the flames as worthless, but Finsin's were saved on the chance his father might pay. Stars gleamed and the dusk was stalking up from the river when the trader descended to the hall and made sure his guard was ready and waiting. As he opened the outer door a nerve-racking cry came from the direction of the Cherokee town. The men heard it without their usual ribald jest.

The trader raised a silver whistle and blew a signal. The Mocker called again, this time much nearer. In a panic lest the evil voice get between him and the fort Bridge whistled a second time and prolonged the call. A crackling of underbush and the whinny of his horse answered, and his fear that some harm had befallen the animal subsided. Now the horse was cantering across a field. Once mounted, with the trail open before him, Bridge vowed he would defy the devil himself to overtake him. He snatched up the bridle and saddle from the horse block and called impatiently to the horse. The animal whinnied and pranced about, but seemed reluctant to approach.

"Stand back with those torches! You frighten him," Bridge yelled to the soldiers who held lighted pine-knots.

The guard drew off to one side. The horse sprang forward like a bolt. What next happened was never described the same by any two of the onlookers. When the steed raced up to the block Bridge caught him about the neck and lifted the bridle. Then he gave a startled yell and seemed to vault across the animal's withers. Back to the woods galloped the horse.

Some of the men swore they heard the trader cry out the name of Yanegwa. Others were equally positive he shouted the name of Little Feather, who had died to escape him. Only on one point did they agree: that his horse carried him to the edge of the wood and that, inasmuch as his heart was torn out before they could gain his side, a Raven Mocker must have got him.

RIVERS

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

FROM where the Mississippi's blue to where it's delta-brown,
I know each bend, each levee, bluff and bayou up and down.
I know the Colorado and its cañoned rainbow cliffs;
And the Nile, awake or dozing, devious as its hieroglyphs;
And the somber, snaky Congo, writhing, reeking, as it crawls;
The Paraná and Iguazú up to its double falls;
The Yang-tse of the Gorges and that juggler, the Hoang-Ho;
The Volga and the Murray and the Amazon I know:
Rivers that water and feed the world, and yet not one stands out
As grandly as the nameless brook where I caught my first small trout.

THE HONOR OF THE ESCADRILLE

By
Gordon McCreagh

Author of "Safe and Sane," "Sense of Balance," etc.

THE general in command of that difficult and important little wedge which nosed into the flat ground before the Hautebois woods sat in his headquarters cave immersed in a sea of maps and surrounded by an alert gathering of staff officers and telephone operators. Out of the vaulted dimness to the right a field-telegraph clicked incessantly. The general stabbed angrily with his compass point at a spot colored red on the map before him.

"*Ces sales Boches là!*" he spat through his bristly grizzly mustache. "Always they appear to have knowledge of what we purpose. *Ss-s-saprist'!*"

He swung in his chair and turned to a tall officer who wore the coveted device of the double wings. He addressed him in English.

"Meestaire Reynold', you will 'ave ze goodness, yes, and send up one of your so brave boys to make obsairvation wis all speed."

"*Tout' suite, mon Général.*" Captain Reynolds saluted and strode from the dug-out.

Outside he jumped into one of the swift autos distinguished by the tiny staff pennant and indicated the hangars half a mile distant. In another minute he was among his own boys of the Escadrille. No need to explain which escadrille, there is but one, those hard-flying, hard-fighting young adventurers to whom even the French aviators take off their hats.

For extreme accuracy it might be added that Captain Reynolds was in command of Flight D which had been specially detailed to that important section. In his little office partitioned off from the quarters he consulted a memorandum sheet of daily operations; then he stepped out and crooked his finger at a lithe, brown-faced young man who jumped to meet him.

"Not exactly your turn, Mackensie; but I want a good man. I wish you'd go up and see if you can find out anything across the line."

Second Lieutenant Mackensie saluted and ran out to his machine. At the door he halted for a second.

"Observer?" he asked.

"No, make it a single hop; and hurry."

A moment later Reynolds followed him, He was already climbing into his machine while a mechanician spun the great propeller. Reynolds called to him.

"Wind, twenty-seven; and strato-cumulus, fifty-five hundred.

Mackensie glanced up at the clouds and nodded quickly. Then to the mechanician—

"All ready?"

"All ready, sir."

"On!"

The mechanician heaved down on the propeller blade and swung sharply clear to the right. The great fins spun twice with a heavy *blip blip* and then swung stiffly back to the horizontal.

"Off!" called Mackensie as he pressed down on the ignition button.

The mechanician cranked the propeller over for a few turns.

"On!"

"On!" said the mechanician and heaved sharply down once more.

This time the engine caught up the ignition with a roar. Mackensie wasted no time in "warming up."

"Let her go!" he shouted.

The other mechanicians who were bracing themselves against the thick entering-edge of the great planes ducked quickly under, and the machine shot away from them, overcoming its inertia with unbelievable speed under the tremendous thrust of its hundred and fifty horse-power engine. Almost immediately Mackensie pulled back on the elevating controls, and without a bump the great machine glided into its own element. Mackensie drew out the gas lever to the last notch and pulled the control almost to his chest. The machine pointed its nose to the sky and whirled the blue smoke from the exhaust to fan out against the grass.

"Whew! He'll tail-slide if he don't watch out," gasped a mechanician.

But Lieutenant Mackensie knew his machine as he knew his own soul. In less than five minutes he disappeared behind a scurrying woolly cloud. Five thousand, five hundred feet, the altimeter read, just as his commander had said.

One of the flyers lounging at the hangar door nodded with appreciation.

"Nice clean climb," he remarked casually.

"You said," agreed another. " 'S more than the Hun can do as yet—well, hope he gets back."

"Uh-huh."

And the group turned into the hangar again. The assenting grunt was the only indication which these quiet men vouchsafed that their comrade had gone to play with death on even chances.

Mackensie did get back. Within the hour he suddenly shot through a white cloud like a falling meteorite. Nose-down he swooped, almost vertically, never flattening till within a hundred feet of the ground. Then he glided into the horizontal and a minute later he skimmed the grass with a precision which rolled his machine to the very doors of the hangar. The wings and fuselage were spotted with neat little round holes, almost a hundred of them. Mackensie climbed out of his perch and pushed the goggles up into his hair.

"Couldn't get a darn thing," he growled. "The air is just buzzing with hostiles and they kept me above the cloud-level all the time. Dived into a hole once and got a glimpse of a million anti-air guns and then a swarm of them chased me."

He strode into the quarters to make out his official report.

It was a cryptic document which he evolved. Below the entries of air conditions and time of departure and return came the following riddle:

> Made enemy's lines at six thousand. Immediately H. A. appeared under my tail, firing. Side-looped and got broadside position, got in fifty rounds Lewis at a hundred. H. A. went down in spin. I was following, when attacked by another H. A. on my tail. Went off on the wing and climbed. Got on his tail, got in good burst of a hundred rounds. H. A. looped reverse. Two more H. A.'s below me. Climbed to fourteen thousand before got clear.

There was more to the same effect; a whole sheet of technical enigma, grimly redolent of battle and murder and sudden death. Interpreted briefly it meant that he had been attacked by an H. A., which meant hostile aeroplane, had escaped by clever maneuvering, had attacked in turn, been attacked again, had taken his turn once more, till finally ever-increasing numbers had driven him off. The condition of his machine showed how fierce had been the fighting.

Captain Reynolds skimmed through the report with a practised eye.

"*Hm.* Couldn't get any of them?"

"No luck at all. I don't know about the first; but they were too many for me."

Captain Reynolds frowned.

" 'S too bad. I never saw such a rotten run of luck as yours. Well, I'll report to the general. Maybe he'll want the whole darn squadron out, though we can't do much with these clouds so low."

But the general saw reason. He realized the impossibility of getting under the cloud-level in the face of the enemy's flyers, to say nothing of the anti-aircraft guns which were dangerous up to ten thousand feet. The attempt had to be postponed, then, to wait for more propitious air conditions. The general chafed, for the enemy truly showed a diabolical knowledge of his plans.

MEANWHILE Mackensie, after his short hour of duty—which, however, involved more nerve-strain than a whole day in the trenches—was sprucing up for a holiday. He had washed voluminously, shaved carefully, and was now attending with methodical exactness to the final details of his well-kept nails. One of his reckless fellows on whose hands time hung heavy pounced on him.

"My, my, look at Mac all camouflaged up like he was going to a wedding! Where away, Mac?"

Mackensie dodged the issue.

"Engine throws oil something fierce. I must get my mechanicians after it."

"Doubtless, old acrobat, *sans doubt; il faut qu'on* jump upon the *cochons avec* both feet. But that don't say what all the disguise is for."

"Well, if you must know, since I've done a day's job I'm going out to relax and jeer at you poor ticks who have to stick around."

"Hear him, fellers. Listen to the leisured patrician. But again I demand, where? Where d'you find all this amusement in this so lugubrious vale of tears?"

Mackensie suddenly grinned at him.

"Hospital," he said laconically.

There was a shout from the rest.

"Ha! Ha!" "Wily fellow!" "Leave it to a canny Scot all the time. Which one is it, Mac? I'll bet it's that tall blonde."

"No it isn't," shouted another. "I know. It's Miss Levasseur. Mac's trying to cut in on Watso here."

The young flyer mentioned flushed angrily at the suggestion.

Mackensie smiled on them easily.

"Wrong again; I'm going on a matter of business."

The crowd greeted this preposterous subterfuge with prolonged howls, and only ceased from their exuberant derision when Captain Reynolds came in and held his hands over his ears. He took a seat on an upturned uniform-case, and it was evident that there was something on his mind.

"Boys," he began slowly, "we've got to do something."

"Sure, Cap'n, let's," came unanimously from the crowd. "What shall we do?"

"No, this is serious, boys. It concerns us as a bunch. The old general is a white man from way back and he's not saying anything; but it's a fact that he's worried about the Huns getting all the information they want. Now it's up to us, boys; I feel that the honor of the outfit is at stake."

His hearers stirred uneasily at this imputation, slight though its was, that they had fallen short in what was expected of them.

"Gee whiz, Cap'n. I hope the general don't think that way. That's pretty strong. But I don't see how anybody can blame us. I'll bet we're keeping our air as clear of observers as they're keeping theirs."

The captain gave a quick sop to their pride.

"Of course, they've put their best men against us here. I suppose that's a compliment to us, but——"

"Well, we're holding them even at that," a stocky youth broke in hotly. "Spite of the fact that they've got more machines."

"I should say. Why, that ground is just sprouting hangars and A. A. guns; there's five big shacks and two more going up. But at that, as Billy says, we hold them even every time. No sir, if they're getting information about the general's works it's not from their sky-observations; it'll be their intelligence system; spy stuff, that's what."

The captain nodded, but without enthusiasm.

"You're right, boys, I know. But it's results that the general looks at; we've just got to do something to put a crimp in their gang. We've got the reputation of all Uncle Sam's flyers to keep up, and, by cripes, we're not going to fall down on it."

"Right, Cap'n! We will!"

These men were not given to wild bursts of cheering or spasms of spectacular emotion—a matter which always amazed their French confrères. They had no emotions as a matter of fact, and all their nervous reactions were strictly under control; but each man felt a glow of hard determination at their captain's quiet confidence.

"Well, I'm going to see if we can get any photos tomorrow," the captain resumed. "I'll have Decker go up with some of you; he's got all his apparatus ready. I'll slate you for first hop in the morning, Watson."

Watson looked up with a sudden frown and he shifted uneasily on his seat. Presently he made bold to speak. His words were nervously formal.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd rather take up somebody else."

The captain was surprised.

"Frankly, sir, I—I don't like 'Heinie' Decker." He laid emphasis on the name. "Nothing against him personally, sir, nothing at all; but—well, it's his name, and—he was born on this side too. I suppose it's prejudice, but if it's all the same to you I'd rather take up somebody else, anybody else."

A series of nods and a grunt or two signified that others of the men felt the same way.

"Ah, what's the matter with Heinie?" broke in Mackensie. "He's the best photographer in the outfit."

"Maybe, but aerial photography is no longer a matter of the individual observer, it's a matter of apparatus and the expert in the developing-room."

"Not entirely, Watso, my son, by no means," replied Mackensie. "It's still up to the observer to know just when to pull his exposure lever; he's got to judge the best position and the best light. Give Heinie to me, Captain; let me have him for keeps, and I'll bet we get more valuable pictures than any of you fellows."

Captain Reynolds looked relieved.

"Very well, if it's so easily settled. I know how some of us feel about the misguided fanaticism of the German-born mind. I'll schedule some other man for you, Watson. And results, boys. That's what we want from now on, results!"

The captain's tone indicated that the serious side of his business was accomplished. Mackensie heaved his lean length from his seat.

"Well, if that's settled, Captain, I've got an important business engagement at the hospital."

Once again the howls of derision rose. Mackensie turned in the doorway and smiled slowly on his fellows with impassive eyes, and then he disappeared. Watson looked after him sourly.

"Huh, results," he muttered, his mind still half-engaged with the captain's exhortation. "If I'd been out on that last observation I bet I'd have got at least one Hun machine."

"Hark at the boy!" laughed a man who carried the coveted decoration of the legion on his chest. "He'd have crashed a hostile. Man, lemme tell you that Mac there is one of the best flyers we have."

"Well, you don't notice that he rates any stars, do you?"

The disgruntled youngster referred to the tiny stars which some of the flyers with a whimsical recollection of their own wild and woolly West painted on their machines to correspond to notches on a gun.

"Luck, pure luck, boy, and you know it. Why, even Barker piloted a scout for two years before he made a kill. Shake it off kid; you're just jealous because he's gone sparking your girl."

The man of experience smote him on the back with fatherly good fellowship. But Watson was very young; and it was quite true, he was jealous. He remained gloomily morose.

THE HUNG about the quarters with restless preoccupation; then he went out to inspect his machine, but before he got 'round even to the rear brace-wires he gave it up and drifted back to the quarters, a worried expression on his smooth sensitive face. Finally he screwed up all his courage and went to his commanding officer. Since there was apparently no prospect of any serious work that afternoon, he preambled, might not he take a couple of hours off?

Captain Reynolds had to laugh out loud at the transparency of the boy.

"Run along, Watson, run right along," he said. "I guess I'll know where to find you if you're wanted."

The captain's guess did not require any great perspicacity. Watson went, almost at a run, straight to the hospital. For an interminable ten minutes he was unable to find his quest, and his face flushed fiercely as he thought of some cozy hidden nook. And then, all of a sudden, he came upon her sitting innocently knitting with two or three other nurses who were off duty.

It was such an agreeable surprise that it was quite a disagreeable shock to his preconceived suspicion. He lost no time, but with that swift American confidence, which always bewildered the girl, he proceeded to cut her out from the bunch and segregate her to himself. After the tide of the first voluble fifteen minutes had abated somewhat his earlier jealous suspicion found time to insinuate itself once more.

"You know," he said half-apologetically. "I thought Lieutenant Mackensie had come to call on you."

The girl's pretty eyebrows lifted with her shoulders in a gesture of surprised denial.

"On me? *Mais quel blague!* How you are fooleesh. *Non*, he come to see ziz Monsieur Dunois, zis *capitaine* of ze *ingenieurs*."

"Engineers! Then maybe it was business. Well, I thought—some of the fellows said he was coming to see you."

The girl could not resist the instinct of coquetry; particularly since she knew that she pouted ravishingly. She executed the maneuver now.

"*Vraiment?* But no, he does not interest me. Howevaire, eef he would wear hees so beautiful costume national it should be different, *ma foi, oui. Il est Ecossais, n'est-ce pas?*"

Watson was not deceived for a moment; he laughed.

"A Kiltie? Well, I don't know. I suppose so, but his accent, if he has any at all, I should say would be more like a German's."

"Ye-es? Well, I 'ave not ze so good fortune zat he call on me; *Il est bel homme, ce Monsieur Mackensie.*"

She pronounced the name with the broad French "A" and the accent on the last syllable.

"Yeah, he is—" Watson who had begun to admit grudgingly his supposed rival's physical perfections, stopped with a sudden catch of the breath.

Something in the girl's intonation had struck a dormant chord in the back of his brain and waked it to acute perception. He knew instantly that it had been there all along.

"Mackensen!" he burst out loud.

"W'at you say?"

"Oh, er—oh, nothing. I just had a funny idea, that's all."

He laughed off his little effusion and proceeded to make love to the girl with the assiduous speed of the man who knows that life is short. But he was not up to form; he was preoccupied and his mind wandered. Presently even the girl's charm could not wholly distract his thoughts from this new thing which hammered at his brain with ever-increasing insistence. He knew that he was becoming dull, and with rare wisdom he forged an excuse and took his departure before he should appear stupid to the girl.

He made speed to get back to the quarters; he could hardly contain himself. He pounced on his friend Britten, a young daredevil of his own age, and drew him away from the crowd.

"Jim," he burst out. "Did you ever notice anything about Mac's accent?"

"No," said Jim. "Why? Hold on though, I think I did, yes."

"Well, did you ever think of his name? No? Well, pronounce it the French way and see. Now just shift the last two letters a bit and take the accent out of the middle. How's that? Mackensen! Von Mackensen! D'you get it?"

The other gasped.

"Aw, rats, Watso. That's a crazy idea."

"Is it though? Just think! Look at him. He's got that cold, deadly method in everything he does, hasn't he? And you saw how he jumped for Heinie Decker this morning. And—" Watson spoke with slow emphasis—"they say he's the best flyer in the outfit, but you notice that he never brings down a Hun machine."

Britten laughed uneasily.

"Shucks, Watso. "You're letting your imagination run away with you. You're just jealous because he went after your girl."

"He didn't though," maintained Watson with dark insistence. "And I'm not having imaginative brainstorms either; you add it all up and see how it hits you. And—gee whiz! I never thought of that! Where are the Heinies getting all their information from?"

Britten laughed again, but there was uncertainty in it this time. However, he rejected the monstrous insinuation.

"Oh, come along, Watso," he said. "Your suspicion is unworthy. Forget it."

"Maybe it is," insisted the other defiantly. "But I'm not going to sleep over it; you can bet I'll keep my eyes skinned."

Britten argued with him, but feebly, and finally he, too, agreed that possibly, after all, there might be—well, it would do no harm to watch anyhow.

The watching during the next few critical days revealed nothing. The lean, inscrutable flyer with the doubtful name and the observer whom he had so eagerly chosen, about whose name there was no doubt at all, made several flights together, and presently the former was going about the camp cheerfully joshing his fellows and making invidious comparisons about their respective photographic observations and trying to lay bets that he and his team-mate would continue to surpasss the efforts of the others. Some of the foolhardy betted—and they lost, always.

Britten called the attention of his suspicious friend to the fact. But Watson only shook his head with dogged insistence.

"Shucks, what's a few photographs of unimportant terrain? That don't mean anything, even if they are technically perfect. And I'll tell you what. I'll swear my soul that I heard them talking German together. You just lay low and watch out."

Then the Mackensie man was noticed to be holding long, guarded councils with his friend, the upshot of which was that he shook his head and muttered regretfully—

"They'll never give us a chance to do it in a million years."

"On our own hook then," growled Decker with sturdy determination. "In the air we make the change."

"Gosh! Can we?"

"Sure," muttered Heinie. "You just fly her. Mine is the rest; so, I tell you."

FOLLOWED more quiet conferences, and the next thing, the two had taken a big Morane biplane, and while mechanics overhauled the engine, they personally proceeded to connect up an intricate maze of control-wires, and finally they mounted a stubby black steel cigar with a small propeller at the front end on the top of the upper plane. Watson just had to go and look into the matter.

"What's the stream-like thing on the roof?" he asked casually.

Mackensie shot a quick glance at him from under his straight brows.

"Servo-motor," he said shortly. "Works by wind pressure."

"Servo? What for?"

"For a Sperry gyro-stabilizer."

"An automatic stabilizer? Cripes, you can't fly with them!"

"Can't you!" Mackensie took up his challenge. "Son, it's already two years ago since Laurence Sperry went up five thousand feet and then climbed out of his seat and walked out to the end of his wing!"

"Yes, I know. But what I mean is, since every dip and roll is immediately corrected by the gyroscopic control you can't do any quick maneuvering."

"Do tell." Mackensie was exasperatingly sarcastic.

But Watson was not to be diverted by any such transparent subterfuge as a forced quarrel.

"What's it for?" he asked bluntly.

Mackensie stood up and looked keenly at him. Decker from behind his back made some quick signals and mouthed something with silent distinctness. Mackensie took it all in without shifting his gaze from Watson's face, and then he smiled his thin silent smile.

"It's for special photographic work," he said evenly; and then he added a disarming postscript. "For details apply to Captain Reynolds."

For a moment Watson was staggered; and then it occurred to him instantly that two such clever spies would surely have found no difficulty in inventing some plausible story which would gain them permission to experiment with the new machine. He called them spies openly in his own mind now, and half he was impelled to go to his superior officer with his suspicions.

But he had not quite enough evidence yet, he reflected. Give them a little more time and they would presently weave a rope long enough to hang themselves with, he said to himself. So he pretended a casual interest and presently got away to consult with his friend Britten.

Mackensie looked after him with narrowed eyes.

"That young fool is going to give us trouble, Heinie," he muttered.

"Too slow," said Heinie phlegmatically. "Already this afternoon we can do it; look at the clouds."

Mackensie nodded. The cloud formation was a low cumulo-nimbus, heavy and dark. Behind them lay shelter and concealment. But the flyer's forehead puckered.

"It's a frightful chance, Heinie," he murmured soberly. "Their own guns'll probably drop us long before we can land in their lines with my precious little packages."

"Neffer," maintained Heinie stoutly, "when we do as I have suggested——"

"And that's a frightful chance too, my friend. That's going to be an awful stunt to pull off."

Decker's pale eyes gleamed with fanatical fire.

"For the sake of the cause which we do," he growled fiercely, "I take twice such a chance."

After the noon hour that same day Watson saw Decker carrying out his intricate camera and attaching it with long bolts to the side of the fuselage just below and a little to the rear of the observer's seat. He wondered for a moment whether, after all, the photographic story might not be true; and then he laughed at his own simplicity and told himself, no, they would never overlook such an obvious give-away. He would just keep watching, he determined, and sooner or later something would fall to his vigilance.

But "too slow" had been Decker's terse estimate of him. He had failed to take into consideration the swift efficiency with which these two men did their work. It was not till everything was ready for the start that by a sheer stroke of luck he saw Mackensie furtively hand a few packages up to Decker already in the observer's seat, neat fat packages of oiled paper about ten inches long.

Suddenly it came to him that it was now! That whatever these two contemplated was going to be done right away.

"Maps," he gasped to himself. "Documents!"

He rushed across the field toward the machine shouting and waving his arms wildly.

"Spin her over!" roared Mackensie to the mechanic at the propeller. "It's on!"

"On!" shouted the mechanic and spun.

Watson's heart came up into his mouth as the engine took up at the first attempt. But this machine was heavier than the usual fast scout which Mackensie drove; the mechanicians had to hold it for a few seconds till the engine picked up its full speed. Watson came racing, clawing along the tail of the fuselage.

"What have you got in those packages?" he yelled.

Mackensie looked down on him and grinned with malicious triumph.

"Ask Captain Dunois over at the hospital," he shouted above the roar of the engine. "Let her go, there!"

The great machine sprang forward and skimmed the grass. Watson was left shrieking and running wildly after it.

But only for a second. Swift presence of mind is one of the first requirements of a fighting pilot, and Uncle Sam's boys have always passed through more severe tests than any of the allied flyers. In another second Watson was racing for his own fast scout which bore the deadly Vickers gun pointing grimly over its nose.

As Mackensie circled to the higher levels he saw him climbing in while there was a rush of mechanicians to the propeller. His face grew hard with annoyance.

"—— young fool! He'll be shooting at us next," he growled. Then with a shrug of unconcern: "Well, I'll hide in the cloud-bank. And if he can follow me there he'll be some flyer."

He certainly would. Flying through the clouds is one of the deadliest trials which an aviator has to face; infinitely worse than flying by night. But Mackensie set his planes in a long slant for the dark bank. Just before he cleaved into it he looked down away to his left once more. Watson's machine was just rising from the ground. Mackensie smiled his thin smile. In another second he was enveloped in heavy swirling vapor which muffled even the roar of the engine. He brought his machine to the horizontal and settled down with alert determination to a long drawn-out game of moist blind man's buff.

Presently Decker stood up in the front seat and turned 'round and waved his hands in some sort of signal. Then with cool daring he climbed out and stepped on to the footway of the lower plane as nonchalantly as though he had been going about some small job with the machine safe and solid in the hangar instead of five thousand feet up in the wet, clammy air. He cupped his hands and roared into Mackensie's ear.

"Just I have thought. What if they notice the paint is wet?"

Mackensie thought for a second, then:

"They won't. Nobody's likely to stoop and look under the plane when we're once on the ground."

Decker nodded.

"Yeah, that's right too. Well, I go ahead with the job."

AND with no more fuss than that he proceeded with his usual slow deliberation to do an unbelievable thing. He dived an arm into the recesses of the front seat and produced a tangle of cords and snap-hooks. Then he made a sign to Mackensie and moved out on the wing surface, careful to rest his weight only on the longitudinal "I" beam and clinging to the brace-wires to keep from being whirled from his unstable perch by the hundred-mile wind which tore at his clothes.

Mackensie watched his balance very carefully and marveled for the thousandth time at the superhuman sensitiveness of the little whizzing gyroscope which detected every shade of divergence from the plane of flight. As he found how it automatically checked up against the increasing leverage of Decker's weight as he made his way out on to the wing he pictured it as a live thing with an alert uncanny intelligence of its own and he thanked its inventor aloud.

But Decker was troubled with no flights of meditative fancy; with unimaginative stolidity he wound his legs 'round the forward center strut and lowered himself to a sitting posture. He unraveled his tangle of rope which resolved itself into a crude sort of hammock arrangement. With methodical exactitude he snapped one of the hooks over the base of the strut. Then, lying on his stomach and leaning far over the hurtling abyss, he groped with his arm and presently the other hook snapped comfortingly into an eyebolt.

Then he straightened himself out again with slow caution and returned as carefully as he had come. From the wonder cabinet of the front seat he now lifted, of all unlikely things, a couple of pots of paint and a brush. He leaned over to Mackensie and held up the spread fingers of one hand three times.

"Fifteen minutes," he shouted. " 'S all I need."

He fought his way out again and lowered himself as before. The pots of paint were disposed of over the edge of the wing, evidently on to hooks below; and then with a cheerful wave of the hand the crazy fanatic slid over into his swaying, straining net.

Mackensie flew on with a tense face through the clinging mist and began to wonder. He wondered if he would feel a lurch if his partner in this wild venture should be shaken out of his awful perch. But no lurch came. Decker, working with iron nerve and sure swiftness painted out the target-circles with which the Allies distinguish their machines and painted in the great black cross of the Germans.

There was no hitch, no accident; everything had been thought out and prepared in advance. In less than the fifteen minutes which he had demanded his round face appeared over the edge of the wing and he wormed his body up after it like a stocky eel. He collected his paraphernalia and returned as before. Mackensie snatched a hand from the steering-wheel and slapped him on the back. Decker grinned back at him and proceeded to climb over to the other side. Mackensie flew like a Japanese ladder balancer who supports a bamboo ladder on his feet while a slim youth in tights climbs about on it and does hair-raising stunts.

In fifteen more minutes Decker crawled out from under the other wing. He was grinning all over like a boy who has been up to mischief; but his face grew fierce as he stooped over Mackensie.

"Goot. It is finished," he shouted. "Now it is in your hands, the great plan. Forwards, and goot luck!"

Mackensie gripped his hand once, and then he drove his machine in a long glide through the cloud-belt to get his bearings. They were far to the south and well over the enemy's lines. Mackensie nodded with satisfaction and climbed again. He proposed to travel through the clear upper strata till he should come again to the Hautebois section.

After hurtling for half an hour through the emptiness—for there could be no air-scouting on a day like that—he began to recognize familiar ground through an occasional break in the billowing blanket below him. Then, far away above him his sharp eyes discerned a tiny mosquito of a machine which immediately dropped down on him like a stone. He grinned with appreciation.

"That'll be friend Watso," he chuckled, and he dived into the cloud again.

Ten minutes later his machine came to a stop behind the neat hangars and the bristling hedge of anti-aircraft guns which he had seen so often from above. Soldiers in flat, peakless caps began to run toward them. Mackensie hopped out and went to meet them. He ignored the soldiers just as though they were cattle. They were used to this: they streamed on past him. Before a slender young man who was obviously of another breed Mackensie halted, clicked his heels together and saluted affectedly.

"Gestatten Sie," he addressed him in clean, incisive Hanoverian German. "I am Leutnant von Mackensen from the Viellegard section; I am out of gasoline. If I might beg."

"Aber naturlich, Herr Leutnant," said the youthful officer without hesitation.

All muffled up as Mackensie was in leather coat and goggles and helmet, there was no discrepancy of uniform for the other to be suspicious about. Mackensie's heart which had been pounding against his chest before the encounter began to return to the normal and he heard the officer speak again.

"Your mechanician will attend to the matter. Permit that I escort you to the quarters and offer you some refreshment."

"I thank you, no," said Mackensie hurriedly. "I have not the time to spare; already I should be back, Excellenz reviews today personally."

But he showed no immediate disposition to go. Instead, he stood engaging the young man in conversation while he saw Decker alight and establish friendly relations with the soldiers. Decker could do with refreshment if there was any to be had, he proclaimed thirstily; and the soldiers grinned and winked and led him into the hangars. Mackensie conversed with the young officer. He knew from his accent that he was a Berliner, and to avoid any awkward questions about the operations further down the line he immediately lied glibly, inventing a fascinating story of having just come back from leave in his home town of Hanover.

The officer was immediately interested, and Mackensie wondered wildly what he could answer to the eager questions about Café Kröpke and Weltman's. For half an hour he fenced with him, and then, seeing Decker in ostentatious evidence beside the machine, he remembered affrightedly the haste which was incumbent on him. With the deepest reluctance he tore himself from such pleasant company.

As he climbed into his seat he whispered to Decker—

"Plant all the packages?"

Decker nodded.

"Camera ready?"

"Sure, everything. Hurry."

"Parat?" called Mackensie to the German hangar crews. *"Also—los!"*

The engine took up beautifully, and in another minute the machine was soaring over the hangars in a wide circle.

AT THE same instant aviator Watson was pouring his excited story into Captain Reynolds' ears, a story of rage and indignation and loathing; and he clinched his testimony by asserting, almost weeping with the beastliness of it, that he had finally seen Mackensie's machine dive down through the clouds into the German lines.

Captain Reynolds was deadly serious.

"It's almost inconceivable, what you say, Watson," he kept repeating with undisguised grief. "But if you're so sure, and since Britten bears you out, I suppose I must take the matter to the general right away. ——! What a beastly mess! Better both come with me, I think."

Twenty-five minutes later Mackensie was dropping like a plummet into his own lines. For the first time since anybody had known him he seemed to have lost some of his phlegmatic calm. He rushed Decker to the laboratory.

"Develop out quicker'n all Hades while I hunt up the chief," he barked at him, and raced for Captain Reynolds' office.

Ten minutes later again he was snatching a series of three wet prints out of Decker's hands and sprinting for the general's headquarters.

When the general heard his name he looked inquiringly at the three American officers, who in turn looked amazedly at one another.

"Qu'on l'admette, immédiatement," he ordered sharply.

Mackensie stalked in and saluted. The general was brusk.

"Well sir?"

"I have just obtained some photographs which may be of immediate importance. First, this one, from three thousand feet."

The general took it. His tone was terse.

"This represents the enemy's hangars. I have seen it before, it is nothing new."

Mackensie handed him another.

"The same scene, sir, two minutes later."

The general looked at it; and looked at it again. And the more he looked, the more puzzled he grew. Two of the hangars were still in plain view; the other three were obscured in the print by white smudges, smoky-looking smudges, with jagged specks apparently bursting from them! Mackensie chose the dramatic moment for handing in the third.

"The same scene again, sir, five minutes later on the return circle."

The general gasped. Where the five sheds had been was a chaos of twisted steel and tumbled sticks from which rose thin wisps of smoke. That was all that was apparent to the naked eye; magnification later would develop details, but it was sufficient. The general gasped some more. Then with quick French intuition he realized the awkward situation which this amazing young man's unexpected entrance had created. He was a man of infinite tact; this was a matter for home settlement. He turned to Captain Reynolds.

"Permit me, monsieur," he said with formal courtesy, "in the name of the French nation to acknowledge yet once again an unpayable debt to the Escadrille Américaine. I will request of you details—later."

The four men walked across the field to their own hangars slowly. Nobody spoke. Captain Reynolds did not know how to handle the wretched situation. They were half-way across before Watson broke the uncomfortable silence with a clean, manly confession.

"I—I've got to apologize to you, Mac," he said—he had the courage to refrain from falling into the formal Mr. Mackensie, "I've been thinking some mighty mean things about you."

"I know it, son," said Mackensie cheerfully. "Captain Dunois who helped me with my bombs learned from Miss Levasseur that you'd got on to the name."

"The name! Then it is—well you see, then, I thought you were a—I thought you weren't an American."

Watson spoke with relief; there was some mitigation for his suspicions.

Mackensie took up the inferred question slowly and rather wistfully.

"Well now, that depends on what you fellows consider an American. You see, my old dad went across before I was born. He quit the old country because he didn't like the *Verboten* stuff and the class distinctions, and he didn't like to be governed by the police bureau 'round the corner; he wanted to have a say in the affairs of his country. Of course, he got into trouble for *majestätsbeleidigung*, *lèse-majesté*, you know; so he beat it over to where free speech was not a crime, and presently he switched the name around a bit and took out his papers.

"Me, I was born in God's country and raised in it too; but I went to college in Hanover, and I quit it for the same reasons as my dad and for a whole lot more; and I've always kinder regarded myself as an——"

"An American, by ——! That's what you are!" Britten burst out almost as a challenge.

And the others grunted—

"You bet!"

"Thanks," said Mackensie quietly. "It does me good to hear you fellows say that."

"Well, I'm sorry, Mac," Watson apologized again. "I feel like a dog."

"Ah, don't worry, son, I don't blame you," Mackensie laughed. "I know darn well we were acting suspicious. We had to, 'cause we'd never have got permission to try the stunt—" he glanced whimsically at his superior officer—"and so I'm down on the captain's books for a bawl out."

"What I don't understand," said the captain quite irrelevantly and ignoring the last remark entirely, "is Heinie Decker."

"Oh, Heinie," chuckled Mackensie, "Heinie's a fanatic, he's a Berserk, a Mad Mullah. He was born in Alsace!"

They walked on in silence again. Their hearts were all a little too full for unrestrained speech. It was Watson with his boyish irrepressibility who broke the tension again.

"We-el," he said slowly. "I guess there's about thirty cunnin' li'l stars coming to your machine, Mac."

The Devil's Dagger

By Farnham Bishop & Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "The Red Witch," "The Pass of Blood," etc.

"AND in proof of our loyalty to his Majesty, I offer, in the name of the town of Kinlochan, one hundred silver pennies to any citizen who brings in the head of Evan the Outlaw. The king's justiciar will bear me witness that I have refuted the lying malice of those who have accused us of giving aid and comfort to the pretender, Robert of Albany, and his bloodthirsty accomplice, Evan. God save his Gracious Majesty, Malcolm, King of Scotland!"

Duncan McIvor, rigid as a statue in his polished mail, scrutinized the speaker with shrewd blue eyes.

"There is no falsehood in this man, however many traitors there be in the town," he decided, and turned his suspicious gaze on the crowd that packed the cathedral square to the very steps, where they were held back by the spears of McIvor's company of men-at-arms. With loud shouting, with waving kerchiefs, the townsfolk applauded their old provost's speech. Loyal? Show them the man who said they were not!

From them, the young captain's glance shifted to the balconies of the houses clustering about three sides of the square, the fourth side of which was formed by St. Andrew's Cathedral. A few casements were shut; the rest were streaming with brightly colored banners and crowded with the heads of women and children. Gay and innocent enough it seemed, this suspected city; but Duncan McIvor had seen treason and murder let loose in peaceful cities before, and he trusted little to their outward show.

He remembered the bloody massacre of 1243, only two years before, when this very Evan the Outlaw had ridden with two hundred lances into Ardross, caught the regent's troops napping, and cut them to pieces. In that terrible night every soldier had been butchered, the regent himself escaping only by the grace of God and a swift horse. And the townsmen of Ardross had unbarred the gates to the murderers.

The applause burst forth again, reverberating deafeningly from the high walls of the houses. Still rigid in his saddle, Duncan shifted his eyes from the crowd to the cathedral portal. A tall, spare man in a stained surcoat of soft leather appeared beside Cospatrick, the provost, and acknowledged the citizens' welcome. This was Sir Hugh Kennedy, Earl of Carfrae, the king's justiciar. A terrible man was he, feared throughout Scotland for his grim gray sword and his fierce gray eye; his visit usually boded little good to the city he honored with his presence.

Nor was Kinlochan the most conscience-free city in the land, either; when the old king died, its people had fought hard in the cause of Robert, his illegitimate son, and had been turned to loyalty only by the efforts of Ronald Cospatrick. All that was forgiven; but Evan the Headless, the blood-guilty outlaw, had not been forgiven, and Kinlochan's most respectable citizens were suspected of taking his pay. Certain it was that the young bloods had been known to toast Evan openly; and goods pillaged from the very outskirts of the capital had a way of showing up in Kinlochan. The townsfolk smelled blood in the air; wherefore they applauded the king's justiciar with all their might.

Duncan's heart swelled with pride in his stern old leader. There he stood facing hundreds of men who might be thirsting for his blood; yet he appeared among them unarmed and unarmored, fearless as was his wont. His hawk's eyes scanning them, the old earl stepped forward, smiling his tight-lipped smile, acknowledging their boisterous applause, and opened his mouth to speak. Then, before he could utter a word, Sir Hugh staggered, flung out both arms, and dropped dead at the provost's feet.

Horrified, the crowd stood stunned and silent, so that Duncan's cry burst on his own ears with a shock of terror. And well might he be terrified; well might the people stand rigid with horror; for, though not a hand in the crowd had been raised, though no one had stood near enough to strike at Sir Hugh, the hilt of a dagger now protruded from the dead man's breast!

Instantly Duncan's eye swept every window facing on the square. If that dagger had been thrown from the pavement, he, sitting his horse a spear-length before the crowd, would have seen the hand that impelled it, would have seen its flash; but he had seen nothing. The windows too seemed harmless as before; excepting those that were safely barred, by his own order, they were all too far away for the dagger to have been thrown from them by any mortal hand.

The people had found their voices now. Some fell to their knees, calling on the saints; some wailed aloud in terror; a white-haired beggar in the blue gown of his caste cried out that the devil had done the deed to bring shame on the good town of Kinlochan. With one accord, the crowd seized on his words, and howled aloud:

" 'Tis the devil's work! 'Tis the devil has done it!"

"Jamieson! Post twenty men at the city gate! Let none pass till I give the word!" Duncan commanded crisply.

Jamieson caught the look in McIvor's eye, and obeyed at once. He was a dour, rangy Borderer on a stolen horse; though he had little liking for his young officer, he understood the consequences of disobedience at such a time.

"You, Kilbeggie," McIvor ordered, "take two-score men and search every house in the town. Arrest all who resist or can not give a good account of themselves. Henderson, mount a patrol, scour the district, and look sharp for signs of Evan's men. Seize all who go armed. Steenson, ride to the regent with the ill news and ask for thirty spearmen."

This done, McIvor dismounted, passed through the line of men-at-arms, strode up the cathedral steps, and touched the provost's arm.

"It grieves me much to do this thing, Donald Cospatrick," he said gravely, "but my duty requires me to place you under arrest. Now that the earl is dead, I am in authority here. If you will go with my fellows to the keep, I will see to my master."

THE provost bowed, and a squad of spearmen led him out through the chancel door and up to the dark-walled keep that towered grimly above the close, steep-pitched roofs of Kinlochan.

Duncan gently took the murdered justiciar in his arms, and plucked at the hilt of the dagger. With all his strength, he could not stir it.

"If I were as credulous as these townsfolk, I might believe it was indeed the devil's work," he muttered. "No man in Scotland could plunge a knife so hard into human flesh that I could not draw it out. It must have gone through a rib as an old wife's paddle goes through new butter."

"Devil's work it was, you may lay to that," a hearty voice answered his musing. "Let me get hold of the hilt, Master Captain; I am a cordwainer by trade, and my fingers are strong."

Flushing at the implied slur, Duncan rose and faced him. The speaker was a heavy-shouldered, muscular man of about thirty, with handsome, hard features, and cold black eyes that roved about with bold restlessness.

"What is your name, and who gave you leave to pass the guard?" Duncan demanded.

"Malcolm Carmichael, citizen of Kinlochan, and of good repute. I was admitted because I brought a message for you. By your leave, I will pluck out this knife for you."

And suiting the action to the word, he seized the hilt with one brawny hand, laid the other against the earl's breast, and wrenched out the dagger.

Duncan caught up the man's hand, took the weapon from it, and examined the palm and fingers.

"Those callouses were made by a sword, not by a cordwainer's knife," he said sternly.

"All free citizens bear arms, and have occasion to use them against the king's enemies," the other replied carelessly.

"True," Duncan admitted; then, fixing his keen eyes upon him, he asked:

"What was the message you spoke of? Speak quickly, for I have work to do."

"The provost bade me ask your leave to take his daughter, Margaret Cospatrick, into my house. Now that her father is in prison, she is homeless, poor lass."

A reasonable request, and a kindly one; but as Duncan searched the man's face, he felt less and less inclined to grant it. Cospatrick was held on suspicion of the most heinous offense: high treason and murder; and therefore, by the hard law of the time, his house and goods passed automatically and at once to the crown. His daughter was homeless, in a town overrun with men-at-arms and probably infested with dangerous characters; yet, to Duncan's eyes, Malcolm Carmichael did not look like a safe guardian for the girl. He did not trust the man; and he did trust his own ability to read men's hearts in their faces.

"I will not," he answered angrily. "You had best go home, Carmichael, and look well to your actions. It is an old saying that he who plucks the knife out may plunge it in."

The cordwainer shot a dark look at him; but before either could speak another word, a woman's shriek rang above the murmur of the scattering crowd and the threats of the soldiers, who were clearing the square. Carmichael darted past McIvor to the far end of the platform between the top of the steps and the cathedral door, and disappeared 'round the corner of the building. Following swiftly on his heels, Duncan saw a young girl struggling in the grasp of two spearmen, upon one of whom Carmichael was leaping from behind.

Reaching out swiftly, Duncan swept the cordwainer off his feet, and flung him down; then he struck first one and then the other soldier across the face with his open palm. The men fell back, recognized him, and hastened down the steps in alarm.

"I ask your pardon," Duncan addressed the girl, "for the incivility of my men, who——"

"Your men?" she exclaimed, her brown eyes opening wide with surprised alarm. "Then it was you that sent my father to prison!"

"If you are Margaret Cospatrick, I must own that I did send your father to prison," he answered with a trace of shame.

As he spoke, he surveyed her with as much admiration as was compatible with respect. She was dressed richly, as became the daughter of a wealthy burgess and one who held the high office of provost; tall, slender, and with the most exquisite features, she would have graced the regent's court. Her cheeks still glowed with the effort of her struggle, and in her disheveled garments, she seemed an offended queen.

"You must know that my father is innocent of this crime," she protested. "I saw you at your post as I came forth from the church; you must have observed all that happened, and seen that he could not have dealt the stroke."

Duncan flushed; he could not remove his eyes from the angry girl, and her very beauty seemed to argue the truth of her words.

"When the king's justiciar is struck down within the limits of a town," he answered, struggling for composure, "that town is held to answer for the deed, and its officers are under arrest until the murderer is found. I hope with all my heart that your father may clear himself. But I would not willingly bring hardship upon you. Your house is now the king's, but you have my consent to occupy it until the regent sends his deputy to take over the town and inquire into the murder."

With charming grace, but with unconcealed scorn, she swept him a low courtesy, and majestically descended the steps. Duncan turned to Carmichael, who stood regarding him sourly.

"Henceforth you will take care not to

lay hands on a soldier of the king," he warned the cordwainer. "This time I pardon you, for it was done in defense of a lady. The next time, it will mean death."

Without a word, Carmichael strode away down the cathedral steps. Watching him, Duncan saw him follow Margaret Cospatrick, and strike up a narrow street after her. Suspecting something vaguely evil in the man's purpose, he beckoned the nearest soldier to him, and pointed in the direction Carmichael had taken.

"A tall fellow in murray and black has just gone up that street yonder," he said. "Follow him, and report to me where he goes, with whom he speaks, and where he lives."

McIVOR established his headquarters in the keep, a small but thick-walled and easily defended castle that had once been the lonely stronghold of the cattle-lifting robber lords of Kinlochan, the last of whom had died, with a lance through his body, a century since. Now that a city had grown up 'round the old castle, it served as a citadel and the arsenal of the town's train-band. The captain of that train-band, together with most of the other municipal officers, had been placed under arrest, for their loyalty was open to question, and Duncan was taking no chances of letting any man escape who might have an interest in the death of the king's justiciar.

His severity caused the townsfolk to mutter ominously, for it was plain that they regarded the murder as the work of some supernatural power. Had they not seen the dagger stand forth in Carfrae's breast, with no hand raised to plant it there? Then why were peaceful burgesses thrown into prison, when a thousand men had seen them standing innocently by at the commission of the deed?

Discontent was doubly dangerous in Kinlochan, in the heart of the district infested by Evan the Outlaw, "the Headless," as men called him. The brigand was credited with uncanny powers; he had the entire countryside in terror of him; his raids were swift, irresistible. Though all that territory had suffered at his hands, no man had ever seen his face, for he appeared always in full armor, with his face concealed by the vizor of his helmet. The superstitious countryfolk said that he was an evil spirit, and whispered that there was no head within that helmet, nothing but a grinning skull. It was this superstition which had given him his title.

But cruel and uncanny as he was, he had stood by Robert, young Malcolm's unsuccessful rival to the throne, with a devotion which won him as much affection from the men of Kinlochan as they dared show. He never raided this town, and he shared the proceeds of his pillage with the rash young townsmen who smuggled across the near-by Highland border. Moreover, if Kinlochan was loyal to the boy-king Malcolm with its head, it was loyal to the defeated Robert with its sentimental heart, and Evan was a hero to the townsfolk, if he was something of a terror to them also.

Duncan McIvor knew that he and his company of spearmen stood in grave danger if Evan chose this all too opportune moment for a dash into the city; the grumbling citizens were almost certain to join hands with the outlaw. The king's men were too few to hold the walls against a numerous and determined enemy, with treason menacing them from within. Therefore, detaching just enough men to hold the city gate and patrol the streets at night, he called in the rest of his command at sunset and posted them in the keep. This, at least, he could hold, and keep the king's flag flying, till his messenger could summon reenforcements from the capital.

Standing in the red light that streamed in through one of the narrow slits pierced in the stone wall for archers to shoot through, he examined the fatal dagger, "the devil's dagger," as townsfolk and soldiers called it. Never in his life had he seen such a weapon. About twelve inches long, it had a simple cross-hilt that was flush with the sides of the thick blade. The blade itself was flat, and instead of tapering toward the point, it broadened out like a spearhead, so that it was very heavy near the point, which was ground both for piercing and for cutting. The haft had no pommel, but was blunt, square, and very rough at the end.

"A bad weapon for a fight," Duncan mused; "ill-balanced, but apt for throwing. Yet this was not thrown, at least not by any mortal man. But that Earl Carfrae was slain by the devil I will not admit, for there are too many in this town who would have been glad to do it."

He searched the steel for a smith's mark; and at last he found one, or the almost obliterated trace of one, near the guard. It had been nearly filed out, and then smoothed over skilfully. He could barely make out the letters "——rg—i."

"No Scottish mark that," he commented. "It is an outland weapon. Why should the devil use a foreign blade, when there are enough smiths here to supply him? If it had been made in Scotland, I should have laid the deed to Evan the Headless, or to one of his cutthroats."

An iron-studded door opened and a man-at-arms entered.

"There is a fellow here to speak with you, Captain," he announced.

"Who sends him?"

"Cospatrick's daughter."

"Bid him enter," Duncan commanded; and the soldier thrust a cringing servant into the room.

The fellow stood twirling his leather cap in his hands, plainly frightened.

"Well?" Duncan queried. "Say on, man; there's naught to fear."

"The lady Margaret commands me," the servant stammered, "to ask your lordship if you would see her."

Smiling at the unmerited title the scared fellow gave him, McIvor asked:

"Surely she would not come here? It is a poor place for a lady."

"She would have you come to her father's house, if your lordship pleases."

"I will come at once," Duncan answered, with alacrity that surprised himself. "Is it far, my lad?"

"Across the square, two streets down and up a wynd," the servant replied.

"AND you dare refuse to release my father, when you know him to be innocent?" Margaret's brown eyes flashed with a scorn that was near hatred.

"I did not say that I knew him to be innocent," Duncan protested. "I know that he did not strike the blow, and his face is that of an honest man; but the town has an ill repute, and I can not swear that any man in it may not have had a hand in the murder."

"But you believe in him?" the girl urged, almost tearfully.

"What I believe matters little. The king's regent will send his deputy to judge the case; I have nothing to do with his verdict, and most certainly I can not set the provost free except by the deputy's order. I will speak to him favorably concerning your father: that is all I can do."

"The whole town will speak for him; we have no need of your intercession," the girl replied, her lip curling. "I should not have expected a woman's word to move you, when mercy and justice will not."

"Mercy and justice are not in my hands," Duncan remarked quietly. "Would you have me false to my duty to please you?"

"I see that you would not stir a finger to please me," she flashed back. "I can not ask you to go, for you have taken my very house from me, and allow me to remain in it only by sufferance."

"You need not ask me; I am going. But if it will give you any comfort, I am doing all in my power to find the murderer; and if I succeed, and it is proved that the provost had no dealings with him, your father will be freed. I think I could name the villain now, but to lay hands on him is a harder matter."

Margaret started forward impulsively.

"Forgive me for my harsh words!" she cried. "I was beside myself with grief. In Heaven's name, who is the man?"

"If I am not mistaken, it was the one man who had most to gain by the justiciar's death. I do not yet know what devilish arts he used, but I feel sure that Evan the Headless slew him."

"Oh, do not name that man!" Margaret cried, her face pale with terror. "His spies are in every household; to breathe a word against him is death!"

"Nevertheless, if he dares come within reach of my arm, I will do my best to bring the deed home to him," Duncan assured her. "He will be Evan the Headless in very truth if he shows himself in Kinlochan."

The curtains parted, and Malcolm Carmichael's bold, sinister face smiled at them across the room.

"This is foolish talk," he gibed. "Evan knows more than to thrust his neck into the snare. He appears only when he is not looked for."

Duncan flushed angrily.

"Master Cordwainer," he said, "I have warned you twice not to interfere in the king's business. I warn you now for the last time. I know not who let you into this house, but it is the king's house for the present, and it is no longer open to you. If I ever find you in it again, I will put you in safe-keeping."

Carmichael did not so much as look at him.

"By your leave, Margaret," he addressed the girl, "I must find fault with you for dealing with this king's man, when you have good friends to help you. I grieve much that your father is falsely imprisoned, and I will do all I can to bring him back to you safely. I ask but one reward if I succeed, and you know what that is. I leave you now, since I am forbidden to stay." And with a sneering smile at Duncan, he disappeared through the curtains.

Replacing his helmet, Duncan turned to follow him; but Margaret stopped him.

"My uncle, Martin Gillespie, will go with you," she said; and opening a panel in the further wall, she called twice.

In a moment a short, pursy man came in, puffing with exertion, his great stomach shaking at every step. He kissed the girl, bowed to Duncan, and took the young man's arm.

When they reached the darkest spot in the pitch-black wynd, Gillespie stopped, and drew Duncan toward him.

"It were best for all concerned, Master McIvor," he whispered, "if ye left the provost's door unbarred this night, and sent the guard away."

"What do you mean?" Duncan asked in indignant surprise.

"Not so loud," the fat man wheezed. "It may mean death if we are overheard. Are ye fond of the sight of blood, young man? Do ye like to see good men killed for nothing?"

"Are you mad?" Duncan replied.

"It is you who are mad. The townsfolk love their provost; if ye hang him, they will throw themselves upon you. Then there will be a deal of killing, much harmless blood will be spilt, and the good town of Kinlochan will be laid waste. I love this town, young man, and I would not see these ill things happen. Therefore I warn you, let the provost escape. Ye need not fear for yourself. When the deputy comes, you say that Evan the Headless surprised the guard and took him away. A few hacked swords and a little pig's blood will give color to the tale, and many men will thank you for it."

Duncan took Gillespie's face in his hands, and held it close to his own.

"Look you," he said, "I have as much regard for innocent lives as you have. I would do anything honest to avoid bloodshed; I have given my men orders to keep peace with the townsfolk at all hazards. But what you propose is not honest, and I will not listen to it. The provost stays in prison till the deputy comes."

"Who is the deputy?" Gillespie asked.

"I do not know; it will probably be the Earl of Ross, who is near by, and has the high, low, and middle justice."

The merchant groaned.

"Ross!" he cried. "'Black' David! There is neither pity nor justice in him!"

"He is as just as he is stern," Duncan contradicted. "His verdict will be fair." And he turned to go.

The other dragged at his arm.

"Wait!" he pleaded. "If ye will do nothing for our sakes, consider yourselves! Though the townsfolk are too weak to withstand you, they may not be alone! Let Cospatrick go!"

Duncan turned on him.

"So Evan the Headless is with you! It is unsafe to tell such treason to a king's officer!"

"I never spoke his name!" Gillespie protested. "I am no traitor, good sir!"

"Then you will do well to wait till the deputy comes," McIvor sternly admonished him.

The merchant's distress was pitiful.

"But I tell ye," he whined, "it is death to wait! The blood of many men will be on your head. Let him go at once! If ye wait till tomorrow, it may be too late!"

Duncan tore himself away.

"You are either mad or a traitor," he said scornfully. "For Mistress Margaret's sake, I will call you mad, and let you go, but do not approach me again."

Leaving Gillespie quaking in the darkness, the young captain returned to the keep. There he found a messenger from the capital, dusty with hard riding.

"The regent can not send reinforcements," he reported. "The Islesmen are up in arms, and he needs every man; but the Earl of Ross will be here with a small escort by noon tomorrow. He bids you have a gallows built in front of the church before he comes."

DETAILING Kilbeggie and three men to this task, Duncan went to his quarters and pondered over the things he had heard. At first he thought only of Carmichael's strong, evil face and arrogant speech. There was something under the man's boldness, or he would hardly have been so ready with his promises to free the provost; nor would he have dared show his ill-will so openly. And what was the reward he expected from Margaret?

"The man can not be in love with her?" he muttered. "A mere cordwainer!"

But the thought suited well with Carmichael's insolent behavior; he was a man who would dare much, Duncan felt.

He shuddered at the idea of this fellow in possession of so lovely and spirited a girl; and suddenly it came over him that such a thing would be more terrible to him than any death.

"St. Andrew!" he cried to himself. "Am I to fall in love with the daughter of a man who may be swinging in a rope this time tomorrow?" And after a moment's reflection: "What if I do?" he asked. "Whether he be hanged or not, I believe him honest, and his daughter is fair enough and good enough for any man. And come what will, I will not let that vile cordwainer have her!"

But he knew that the morrow might bring trouble; the sight of the provost at the gallow's foot might stir the already restless townsmen to fury. If it came to a fight, and there were anything in Gillespie's implied threat that Evan the Headless would bring his outlaws into the battle, then Duncan himself would almost certainly die.

"If Carmichael is one of them—!" he cried.

Yes, if Carmichael was in Evan's pay, then defeat for the king's troops would mean that Margaret would fall into Carmichael's hands. She was doubtless promised to the man as a reward of his treason!

"She shall know of it, however," he resolved; and took inkhorn and parchment, thanking his stars for the chance that he had been brought up in a monastery. A little later, he dispatched the following letter by a trooper:

To Mistress Margaret Cospatrick:

I, who have brought your father into peril of his life, who may yet be the instrument of his death, confess without shame that I love you. If your father is acquitted tomorrow, I shall ask him for your hand; if not, you shall hear of me no more. But whatever happens, I will not abate one jot of my duty to the king. Beware of Carmichael; I have reason to believe him a traitor and a spy of Evan's. Farewell, and the saints be with you.

Duncan McIvor, *Serviens Regis.*

His mind cleared by this confession, he reverted almost instantly to the interview with Gillespie. As he went over it in his mind, five words sang themselves in his ears with more and more significance—

"Morning may be too late!"

He sprang to his feet.

"Would to God I had questioned that fat dolt more closely!" he reproached himself. "He knows more than I gave him credit for! Here, Henderson!"

The lantern-jawed patrol leader had ridden in at sunset to report the district quiet and no sign of Evan and his outlaws. He now appeared promptly, though yawning and obviously saddle-sore.

"Take charge here," ordered Duncan, "I go to the city gate, to consult with Jamieson there on matters of importance, and may not be back till dawn."

Without waiting for an answer, he snatched up a black cloak to hide the gleam of his mail, and crossed the city to where his second in command kept restless watch at the gate.

"Best take a patrol with you, Captain," he urged, when McIvor told him of his suspicions and his intention to probe them personally.

"How many can you spare me, of your score?" asked Duncan.

"Not one—we are too few to hold the gate-house now——"

"The same is true of the keep," interrupted Duncan. "So I go alone—to question a fat old carle who could not harm a hare. Remember, your duty, and Henderson's, is to hold the town till the deputy comes. Farewell."

As McIvor readjusted his cloak and turned away, Jamieson saw that he was carrying, stuck through his belt, the devil's dagger—at midnight, too, when, as all men know, the Evil One has power! The superstitious Borderer crossed himself and gave up all hope of ever seeing his young officer alive again.

The moon was up, but the streets and houses of Kinlochan were otherwise dark, for the captain had given orders for all citizens to be at home and in bed by the curfew hour, now long past. As Duncan crossed a side street, a man stole out of a house-door, closely muffled. Duncan seized him by the arm. The man started violently.

"Where does Martin Gillespie live?" Duncan questioned.

Trembling in his grasp, the man pointed up the street.

"Two turns to the left and at the end of a close," he answered.

"And now, what are you doing out at this hour?"

The fellow faltered.

"Back in with you, and do not stir outside your door again tonight, on pain of death!" snapped McIvor.

The other bolted into his house like a rabbit into its burrow.

As he entered into the close to which the culprit had directed him, Duncan heard a door creak on its hinges, and flattened himself against the high wall which formed the side of a tall, rambling house. Watching intently, he saw a hooded figure steal out softly and shut the door behind it. Straining his eyes, he made out a massive shape between him and the moonlight, a familiar shape, with the only stomach of its size in Kinlochan. It was Martin Gillespie.

But though he had come to question this very man, the citizen's illegal appearance at midnight changed the course of Duncan's intentions. He recognized at once that if there was any mischief afoot, Gillespie's nocturnal sortie was proof not only of his knowledge of it, but of his complicity. Clearly, however much he desired to avoid bloodshed, he was still more anxious to free the provost. For that there was a plot to free the provost, by force if necessary, Duncan no longer doubted.

Tiptoeing cautiously toward the street, he followed his man's portly figure to the turn, down a narrow, winding side street, to the rear entrance of a large, six-story house with a high-pitched, many-angled roof and a wilderness of chimneys. Gillespie mounted the steps and looked about apprehensively. Duncan dropped to the cobblestones just in time, and heard the merchant knock at the door four times in rapid succession. Instantly the door swung open, and closed again as soon as Gillespie was inside.

Waiting long enough to avert suspicion, Duncan wound his cloak about his face, loosened his sword in its scabbard, and judging that the knock was a signal, rapped four times, as Gillespie had done.

The door opened at once; the hall was dark. A hand fell on his, and guided him down a long passage. At last his guide knocked at an invisible door, and a blaze of light burst upon them. Stepping over the threshold, Duncan found himself in an interior room without windows, and ventilated only by a small air-shaft. Across the room a fire was burning in a grate, around which stood or sat a dozen armed men. Among them, Duncan recognized five of the most prominent and orderly citizens of Kinlochan; the rest were obviously of the poorer sort, but all resolute-looking fellows. He noticed with disappointment that Carmichael was not among them.

IN HIS excitement, Duncan allowed the cloak to drop from about his head, and his polished helmet caught and threw back the firelight. Instantly confusion broke loose. Those who were seated leaped to their feet; some made for the darkest corners of the room, others pressed forward toward him, fumbling at their sword-hilts. At once Duncan drew his own sword, and prepared for defense. The room echoed with angry shouts of "Kill the king's man! Cut him to pieces!" Yet none seemed anxious to be the first to face his blade.

From the angle of the chimney, Martin Gillespie shouldered forward, thrusting his great stomach through the press. With an effort which left him gasping, he hoisted himself up on to the top of a massive table, and panting for breath, brought out a shout that made the conspirators pause.

"Harm him not!" he cried. "It was he who imprisoned Ronald Cospatrick! Seize him, but wound him not; we will hold him as hostage for the provost's safety!"

Here was the moment on which Duncan had counted; when he might, by cool reasoning and his own promise to say no word of this meeting to the authorities, dissuade the citizens from violence and armed rebellion. But before he could speak, a panel opened in the wall beside the chimney; there came the clank of mail, a shrill whistle; and a gleaming figure strode into the room. Duncan, his sword still outthrust in defense, stared at the newcomer in amazement. He was a tall, powerfully built man in shining mail, his face completely concealed by the vizor of his helmet.

"You crack-brained fools!" the armored man said quietly, but in a voice that pierced through and silenced the din. "You will have the troops here in a moment. Kill this fellow quietly, and be done with it."

"But, good Evan," Gillespie protested, "would it not be more prudent to hold him as a hostage? If we slay him, the king's spearmen will butcher us all!"

"The king's troops will have enough to do to save their own lives," the outlaw answered. "This lad here is both brain and heart to them; put him out of the way, and his men will offer small resistance tomorrow. Consider, men of Kinlochan: if McIvor escapes, he will bring a charge of high treason against all of you, and then it will be hey for a short grace and a long rope. Now kill him quickly, or I will call my men off and leave you in the lurch."

Believing all his enemies were in front of him, Duncan had waited calmly until the outlaw furnished him with all the information he wished; but he was speedily undeceived. A light appeared at the far end of the corridor; the sound of many feet came toward him; and before he could dash for the street door, that too swung open, letting in two tall fellows in steel caps, who struck at him fiercely with long knives.

Duncan had no room to strike back; besides, with armored men on both sides of him, his position was untenable. There was only one way out: forward through the crowded room. At least most of his opponents there were half-trained, peace-loving citizens. Swinging his sword, he plunged straight ahead, striking to right and left with the flat. Unused to desperate fighting, the townsmen made way before him, or fell headlong beneath his blows, until the captain stood within striking distance of Evan the Headless, with no one between to save the outlaw from his stroke. Duncan raised his sword, felt a weapon thud against the stanch steel rings on his back, and realized instantly that he had no time to fight.

Lowering his point, he dealt Evan a mighty blow with his left fist against the meshed mail covering the throat. The outlaw fell heavily, still struggling to release his sword from the scabbard in which it was jammed. Like a flash, Duncan leapt over the prostrate man, through the panel, and found himself at the foot of a secret stair, lighted with candles stuck in sconces on the wall. He slammed the panel shut, and dashed up the stair, extinguishing the candles behind him as he ran. The stair wound in a spiral, without so much as a door opening from it, story up after story.

Behind him the well roared with the clatter of his pursuers' feet upon the wooden treads. Clad as he was in complete chain-mail, his breath came shorter and shorter, till he no longer blew out the candles as he passed them but struck them out with his hand. If there were only a door through which he might dodge! What if this way led him into an impasse, a room from which there was no exit? But trap or no trap, he must go through it to the end.

Suddenly he shot out through an open door into a large, meagerly furnished room. Slamming the door behind him, Duncan hunted for and found a bolt, and shot it, just as the first of the pursuers hurled himself against the other side of the door. Looking for something to barricade it with, Duncan laid hands on the large table, on which a candle was burning, in the center of the room. His eyes fell on a piece of parchment beside the candle. It was his own letter to Margaret Cospatrick!

But it was more than his own writing. Added to it, like a postscript, were the following lines:

> MALCOLM CARMICHAEL:
>
> I know by this that you are a traitor. For the sake of the love you say you have for me, I will not give you over to the soldiers; but I command you to leave Kinlochan at once and never look upon my face again. If you have had a part in the crime of which my father is falsely accused, and I ever obtain proof of it, I will denounce you.
>
> MARGARET COSPATRICK.

The crashing impact of a heavy battle-ax on the other side of the bolted door, and the gleam of its edge through the splintering panel, recalled Duncan to a sense of his present danger. Hastily placing the parchment within his helmet, he thrust the table against the door leading to the secret stair. Across the room was another door, with a great iron key in the massive lock. Bounding over to it, he whipped out the key, opened the door, sprang through, closed and locked it from the outside.

Looking about him, Duncan now found himself in a long, narrow attic, lit by the moonlight streaming in through a solitary dormer window at the far end. Half-way between him and the window, the head of a staircase rose through the dusty floor. Here was a possible means of escape to the street, and Duncan hastened to it eagerly. But even as he did so, there came a rush of feet on the floor below, and a throng of men swept swiftly up the stair. Their leader, a tall fellow armed with sword and buckler, gave a joyous cry at the sight of the captain's figure outlined against the moonlit window.

QUICK as thought, Duncan dropped his own sword, and laid hold of a great iron-bound clothes-chest that stood beside him at the head of the stair. With the strength of desperation, he heaved it up at arms' length above his head. At the sight of the huge bulk poised, black and threatening, before him, the leader of the attackers crouched behind his upraised shield, but in vain. Like a stone from a catapult, the monstrous missile came crashing down, crushing the life out of two men, transfixing a third upon the sword of the man behind him, and sweeping them all into a tangled, shrieking heap at the bottom of the stair.

A sudden thunder of blows on the other side of the locked door told Duncan that those who had pursued him up the secret stair would soon be through into the attic. Through the cries and curses of the wounded, he could hear more men coming up the lower flights of the staircase he had just cleared; obviously there was no escape for him that way, nor could he hope to hold the stairway against attack from both front and rear.

Running lightly to the far end of the attic, Duncan climbed through the narrow window out on to the steeply sloping roof. There he took up his position, to the right of the window and a half-step higher up the roof, his left hand resting on the ridge of the little dormer, his sword upraised and ready. Soon he heard the door of the inner room come crashing down. In an instant, the attic seemed full of men, shaking the house as they rushed back and forth across the floor, overturning chests and boxes, and thrusting their sword-points into every nook and corner.

Presently, a man wearing a steel cap went to the window and put his head out. Still wearing the steep cap, his head rolled down the slope of the roof, fell over the edge, and lodged in a sort of valley between two lower gables.

Those within came thronging to where the headless trunk lay by the window in a widening pool of blood that looked like ink in the moonlight; but no man offered to step across it and beneath the terrible blade that they knew was waiting outside.

"Come, Evan the Headless," called Duncan in grim mockery. "What have *you* to fear?"

But Evan stirred not, nor made reply, till one of his followers suggested that some of them go out another window.

"This is the only window from which this part of the roof can be reached," Duncan heard the deep voice of the outlaw say decisively. "We have the young fool safely trapped now. Bar fast the shutter, post four to watch here and leave the rest to me."

A solid shutter of heavy boards was promptly placed in the unsashed window and made fast from within.

Thus left alone on the roof of the house, Duncan sheathed his sword, climbed to the high-pitched ridge-pole and looked about him, by the bright light of a nearly full moon. He was trapped indeed, on the top of a sort of tower that rose fully two stories above the rest of the house. There was not as much as a chimney-pot for him to take cover behind, and at any moment he might hear the twang of a bowstring from a dark corner of the roof below and feel a cloth-yard shaft tear through his shirt of mail. Listening apprehensively, he suddenly heard a voice, the voice of Martin Gillespie, speak these words, apparently in his very ear.

"Evan had best haste over the wall and ride hard, if he is to bring his two hundred lances here by tomorrow noon."

In his astonishment, Duncan nearly fell to his death in the street below. Looking about him, he discovered a low, hooded opening in the roof, and realized that it was the top of the airshaft ventilating the room on the ground floor where the conspirators met. But the shaft was far too narrow for his broad shoulders ever to squeeze through. He must find some other means of escape.

Then there came to Duncan's ears the blessed sound of the tramp of disciplined feet, and he knew that one of his own patrols was passing by. A shout rose to his lips; but he checked it, realizing that to call out thus from the housetops would almost certainly rouse the town and start a general fight that otherwise might be avoided—for now he knew that the other side would not be ready to strike till tomorrow noon.

By the loom of St. Andrew's cathedral tower against the sky, Duncan saw that this great rambling house on whose roof he sat was much nearer than he had realized to the square; so much so that its front in all probability faced on it. If he could but work his way to that end of the roof, he might succeed in attracting the attention of the patrol without giving the alarm.

Swinging his right leg over the ridgepole, Duncan made his way down the moonless side of the roof, cautiously, for the slope was steep and the old, moss-grown slates were slippery. Half-way down, he turned and began to walk as fast as he dared along the slope toward the front. He was two-thirds of the way there when, without an instant's warning, a cracked slate snapped off and broke away beneath his tread; his feet flew out from under him, he fell heavily on his right side, and shot, feet foremost, down the slope and over the edge of the roof.

"St. Andrew, save me!" he prayed, as he fell through the dark.

Then he struck; not, as he had feared, on the pavement but on the lower roof. This also sloped so steeply that his fall was not broken abruptly; but again turned into a slide. Down he shot with increasing velocity, for now he was in a sort of trough between two gables, slippery with slime left there by the rains of many Winters. Vainly clutching for any handhold, he felt his legs shoot over the edge of the roof, and his body follow and fall once more straight down, this time to certain death. Then, miraculously, his hands touched and gripped something hard and round.

Looking up, Duncan saw that he was hanging, at arms' length, from a long waterspout, with its mouth shaped like a dragon's head; just such a gargoyle as then projected from the eyes of any large dwelling, or may be seen grinning from the tower of a Gothic cathedral today. Thanks to his wearing chain-mail, his skin was untorn, and he was none the worse save for a few bruises. Silently thanking St. Andrew, Duncan began to pull himself up, to climb on the lower roof and there try his fortunes anew. But, before he had raised himself an inch, he saw something that so startled him that he nearly relaxed his hold on the waterspout.

Directly in front of him, as he hung, and perhaps a dozen feet away, the side of the house was built out at right angles. Through a window in this wing, Duncan could now look down into a lighted room, where, beside a table on which a candle was burning, loomed the mail-clad bulk of Evan the Headless. The outlaw appeared to be talking with some one who sat on the other side of the table. All that Duncan could see of this person was a lean brown hand, that rested on the table where the candlelight was brightest. What startled him was that this hand was clutching a duplicate of the devil's dagger!

"WHERE is Duncan McIvor, who should command here?"

Black David, Earl of Ross, sat on his horse in the city gate and glowered down at the unhappy Jamieson. Wriggling under the merciless black eyes of the king's deputy, the embarrassed Borderer stammered out a tangled tale of midnight and devil's daggers and black magic; the gist of which was that the captain had disappeared and that the search parties Jamieson had sent out had failed to find the slightest trace of him.

"Fool!" said Black David, contemptuously. "When you had the provost and half the other town-officers in the keep! A touch of hot coals to their feet or a few twists of a cord 'round their skulls, and they would have told all. Out of the way, there! Forward!"

Followed by his own scanty escort of ten mounted men-at-arms and forty archers, the Earl of Ross rode, unwelcomed, through the streets of Kinlochan. Contrary to the wont of folk whose town is visited by a king's deputy, the people had not assembled in the square to witness the spectacle and the trial. At every house-door, however, and at every street-corner, men were waiting in grim and ominous silence. Not a woman or a child was to be seen, except here and there at a high window, the shutters of which were half-closed.

Ross knew the signs and prepared for battle. In an incredibly short time after he had ridden in through the entrance to the keep, he rode out again, clad now in full armor. Behind him marched his own half-hundred and most of McIvor's company, the latter guarding the provost, the captain of the train-band, and the other municipal officers, in chains. Marshaling his men in battle array at the foot of the gallows, Black David ordered the hostages to mount the scaffold.

ONE other person was asking, in an anguish of suspense: "Where is Duncan McIvor?" It was Margaret Cospatrick, who sat watching the ominous preparations from the balcony of a window overlooking the scaffold. Not all her uncle's protestations could persuade her to withdraw behind the shutters.

"He said he would find the murderer," she insisted, "and unless harm comes to him, he will."

"I tell ye, lass, he must be dead," the merchant urged. "He would not fail to meet the earl otherwise. The town rings with rumors of his murder at the hands of the outlaws."

Prudent Martin was not the man to confess his own part in Duncan's disappearance.

"It would take more than a few cowardly outlaws to kill him," Margaret flashed, "and he is not the man to leave a helpless girl without comfort when her father is at the point of death."

The frantic Martin was moved to rudeness.

"One would say ye were foolish over the lad," he exploded. "It does not become a decent girl, whose father is about to hang, to waste grief on one of his murderers."

The girl turned on him, her face scarlet.

"Martin Gillespie!" she cried, the tears gathering in her eyes, "if you were twice my uncle, you have no right to talk of me thus, or to abuse a good man. Aye, he is a good man. He did but do his duty, and then threw himself into peril for my sake. For all we know, he may be lying dead for my sake this moment! He loved me, and if he comes back alive, I will not forget what he did for my love!"

Martin Gillespie became purple and choked.

"BE IT made known, in the name of the king, that the town of Kinlochan is held suspect of the murder of Sir Hugh Kennedy, Earl of Carfrae, Justiciar of his Majesty. Be it known that the said town is also suspect of making way with and murdering one Duncan McIvor, in command of the king's troops, occupying the said town. Wherefore, in the king's name, I, David, Earl of Ross, deputy for the king, do hereby command that unless the murderer or murderers be produced within half the space of an hour, the provost and officers of the said town of Kinlochan be duly and well hanged, in satisfaction of the king's vengeance."

The herald's trumpet was drowned out by a prolonged howl of hate and fury from the grimly waiting men in house-doors and street-corners. Through their outcries rang another trumpet, blown three times, from without the wall. A cloud of dust, through which came the gleam of lance-points, bore down on the city gate. Out from the nearest houses came rushing a throng of townsmen, who had been waiting for this moment and signal. Before the startled Jamieson and his twenty could turn and strike a blow, they were overpowered and the gate-house captured. 'Round whirled the windlasses, down dropped the drawbridge, up creaked the portcullis, and open flew the gates of Kinlochan.

With thunder of hoofs and jangle of mail, two hundred horse swept through the city gate. Boot to boot they rode, in column of fours, with lances in rest. Over their armor they wore black tabards; at their head rode Evan the Outlaw, his face concealed by the bars of his vizor. At the sight of him, the jubilant townsmen burst forth from doors, streets and alleys, brandishing swords, pikes and Lochaber axes.

Black David, his face cold and stern, signaled to his herald, who blew loudly, just as the combined forces of the citizens and outlaws poured into the side of the square opposite the cathedral and the gallows. Thinking this the sign of surrender, the people stopped and listened eagerly.

"As an example to all traitors, let Ronald Cospatrick and his accomplices be hanged at once!" cried the earl.

The townsmen stared at each other

aghast for a single moment; then frenzy seized them, and they surged toward the scaffold. Evan the Headless waved to his outlaws, who were wheeling into line; down came the lance-points, couched for the charge. The Earl of Ross roared an order, his archers bent their bows, the men-at-arms locked shields and formed an unbroken hedge of spears. The hangman placed the noose 'round Ronald Cospatrick's neck.

"Hold! Stay the execution! Here is the murderer!" A voice rang clear and high through the startled square.

Duncan McIvor burst through the ragged disarray of the townsmen, half-dragging a little, dark man with frightened eyes, who held in one hand something large and cumbrous, wrapped in green cloth. In the other hand, held high over his head by Duncan's iron fingers round his wrist, he clutched a strangely shaped knife for all to see.

"The devil's dagger!" cried a hundred voices among the townsmen. "And look, the outlander has its fellow in his girdle!"

"Heed him not—it is but a trick of the king's men!" shouted Evan the Headless. "On—on, and save your provost!"

But the men of Kinlochan were now beginning to feel that their provost was saved already, without any need of their risking their own necks. They saw the deputy sign to the hangman to wait, and to the captain to bring his prisoner nearer. They looked at the troops, standing there so steady and silent—and instinctively they stood and grew silent themselves. They would not charge, and without them, Evan dared not.

Had he done so, had he hurled his two hundred wild riders across the square, he would certainly have trampled Duncan and his prisoner to death, and perhaps have broken the shield wall and won the day. No one there knew this better than the king's deputy, yet, for all the notice Black David took of Evan and his band, the outlaws might have been a week's ride away. And that, if Evan had but known Black David better, was a bad sign.

"Captain McIvor," he said to Duncan sternly, "where have you been this long time, and who is this fellow you bring before me?"

"One whom I met up with on the roof of yonder tall house last night," answered Duncan, gravely. "He was there for the purpose of putting one of those strange daggers of his into me, as he did into Sir Hugh Kennedy. But, being closer than he thought, I took him by the neck and held him over the edge of the roof till he confessed all. Then, there being no other way off the roof, I had him take me to his room—a secret room, which has a little round window or loophole most cunningly concealed among the carved stonework across the front of the house. There I waited till those others in the house, who would not have let me depart alive, rushed out into the street but now."

"What is your name?" Black David demanded, but the accused made no reply.

"Ridolfo is his name—he is a native of Genoa," said Duncan, the other nodding assent. "Your lordship can speak with him in French, as I did, for he knows no Scottish."

"Do you confess to the murder of the king's justiciar?" Black David asked, in halting French, and received a calm affirmative.

"Being an outlander, you had no quarrel with the dead man," Black David pursued. "Who suborned you to do it?"

Now with the gallows before him, the Italian instinctively looked for help to the source from which he had often received it before. He looked full at Evan, eyes beseeching the outlaw to rescue him. But Evan, fearful that the man would betray him, and glad of a chance to save his own face and retire with some show of dignity, cried out loudly:

"If yon outlander is the murderer, hang him and be done! I came here to see justice! Hang him!"

Ridolfo guessed the answer from his master's tone, and his dark eyes sparkled with hate.

"Wait!" Duncan protested. "If it please your lordship, let the man show how the murder was done."

"Show!" Black David commanded.

Removing the cloth from his burden, Ridolfo displayed a short, thick steel bow set in a heavy stock, to which a small windlass was attached near the grip. At the fore-end was a steel stirrup; this Ridolfo planted on the ground, placed one foot in it, and with both hands revolved the cranks that drew back the string to where it was caught and held by a trigger. Then setting the blunt rough pommel of the dagger to the drawn string, as if it were a bolt or arrow, the Italian held up to the gaze of deputy and people—a Genoese cross-bow, the first ever seen or heard of in Scotland. Thus holding it, with Duncan's arm over his hand to prevent treachery, he whispered in Duncan's ear; and Duncan said softly to the earl:

"It was Evan the Outlaw who ordered the crime. I beg your Grace to grant this man his life; he has dealt faithfully with me."

With a cold smile, Black David nodded, touched Ridolfo's arm, and pointed to Evan the Headless, whose horsemen were now commencing a steady and well-ordered retreat, secure in the knowledge that Black David had but ten mounted men-at-arms, and that he would be loth to risk loosing a volley of arrows across the crowded square, while the temper of the townsmen was still uncertain. For heavy-armed infantry to pursue and overtake retreating cavalry was, of course, impossible.

As the earl pointed, Ridolfo understood, and so did Evan. Fear clutched at his heart; with a wild cry he clapped spurs to his horse, even as Ridolfo took aim and shot. The dagger, cleaving two hundred feet of space too fast for eye to follow, struck the rider full between the shoulders with a sound like the blow of an ax. The dreaded outlaw fell from his horse, and sprawled on the pavement. In wild disarray, his followers spurred their horses into a gallop and plunged, colliding and hurtling each other to the ground, for the city gate and through it.

"Go you," said Black David to a soldier, "and unlace his helmet."

The man obeyed; cutting the laces, he plucked off the steel head-piece, and held the dead man's head so that all could see his face. A loud shout of stupefaction rose from all parts of the square. Evan the Headless was Malcolm Carmichael!

Signing for silence, Black David addressed the people:

"Justice is done," he said. "I restore Ronald Cospatrick to all his honors and offices, and I give freedom to his fellow officers. Some of them may have been a thought disloyal; but he who misled them is punished, and I pardon them. Ridolfo the Italian is free to go and come where he likes, so long as he does not remain in Scotland. As for Duncan McIvor, who found the murderer and solved the vexed matter of the devil's dagger, I can promise him an ample reward at the king's hands. Henderson, strike off the prisoners' chains, and then go see how Jamieson and his fellows fare at the gate. McIvor will come back to Scone with me and tell the regent how he unearthed this business."

The townsfolk cheered themselves hoarse, tossing their caps in the air. They rushed toward Duncan, loading him with praise and admiration. But Duncan burst from them and ran to the scaffold, where Margaret Cospatrick lay sobbing on the rough planks, clasping her father's knees. Tenderly, Duncan raised her up; she turned, looked into his eyes, and threw her arms about him.

IN DEFEAT

BY MARX G. SABEL

I PLAYED—I lost.
Whatever be the cost
I'll face it undismayed—
Knowing that I played.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE *for* READERS, WRITERS *and* ADVENTURERS

AS IT happens, the former letter from "Peas River" read at our Camp-Fire brought an inquiry from an Army officer connected with some of the people mentioned in that letter—a kind of unintentional "Lost Trails" accomplishment such as happens every little while through our Camp-Fire meetings. This second letter, also dealing with Western old-timers, is self-explanatory. I leave in the part about our movement for good citizenship; it serves as sample of the magnificent response to the call to good Americans—the response that assures the practical success of the American League for Citizenship.

Clarksdale, Miss.

Concerning my letter in your first March issue I wish to correct a mistake. It was A. T. Boger (not Boyer) that was appointed sheriff of Wilbarger Co., Texas, when Tom Stewart was ousted. I am sorry I am such a poor scribe; some one will pick me up on that sure. That is why I hasten to correct it.

I read with pleasure D. Wiggins' letter, especially that part about Chalk Beeson, Bill Hart and the single-action Colt. By the way, that was the only kind of a revolver to be found in the West in an early day. If I see Bill advertised I will sure drop in and see that old Colt. May be it won't be the first time I've seen it.

The best thing I have read in *Adventure* or any place else is "a creed for Americans." That is fine. All we need is to get enough people educated along these lines and we can do the thing we want to do—build a good house out of good bricks—"PEAS RIVER."

FROM Thomas E. Webb of Camden, Arkansas, comes the suggestion of a monument in New York to the memory of Jack London. "What if old Jack could but look back and behold in the presence of a huge marble the esteem in which he was held," writes Mr. Webb. "There's not an adventure-loving man in all America, England or where not but would contribute his share toward such a monument."

That seems to me a good idea. How do the rest of you feel about it? If a guaranteed committee of some kind were formed I dare say the money would come in freely. Personally I'm already carrying all the work I can tote—more, I judge, from what it did to me the first few months of 1918—but perhaps *Adventure* could, if desired, serve as a repository for contributions, our responsibility ceasing when the total was paid over to the committee.

WHAT kind of monument? I should say something simple and solid. How much money should be collected? Where should it be placed? What inscription?

I do not know Mr. Webb personally, but perhaps it would be the best plan for all interested to write to him and shape up a definite course of action. There ought to be a monument to Jack London and from whom could it come more fittingly than from the adventurers who gather about the Camp-Fire from all over the world?

A LETTER from one of our American comrades with the Canadians in England. At the end of it was a postscript, which has gone into "Lost Trails," inquiring for Richard Granville, "Linderfeldt," "Captain King," "Lea," "Dad Biddle" and the rest of the "American Legion" that was in Mexico.

Salt Pons,
Sandwitch, Kent, England.

There are many Yanks in this camp, from Maine to California. We wear the Canadian uniform mostly. Not a few are very homesick, yet as an average they are doing their bit as men. Many of them are holding some office as N. C. O. and some have commissions as lieutenants and captains. We have enough to eat and good quarters, as soldiering goes—better than I had in Mexico under Villa or Madero—and no fighting yet. Plenty of amusements. Wet and dry canteens, cinemas or movies, concerts, as there is some splendid talent in the ranks. But I miss my "Java"; here it is tea or cocoa.

AND what a medley of dialects, Scots, Irish, Welsh, English of several varieties, Yanks from Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, Colorado, California, Australians and negroes. This is a study in sociology or hobo-ology; any way it's interesting. Especially when I enter the dining-hut to hear a Welsh orderly say, "Two more mans up this way." And if you were to be transported to our sleeping quarters about nine P.M. and woke up you would wonder if you had fallen into a "Nut Factory" and whether they used chloroform on the poor things.

But they are a fairly good-natured bunch. I have many warm friends among both men and officers, and expect a raise in rank soon. I am winning it here as well as in Mexico, Honduras, the U. S. A. and some others, on my merits only. From the ranks up it is not so easy here. Lots of red tape, savvy?

I AM full of real news and copy but no use writing it to be torpedoed by the censor, but I can tell you something about the country. Its quaint old houses with tile and thatched roofs, old wind-mills, castles, with walls twenty feet thick—they all look like oil paintings—and canals, tall bridges, large pasture-lands filled with sheep, and they are in good condition as the Winter has been mild. I was out and picked some wild daisies to-day and was boating on the river—no, not joy-riding, just a part of my duty, in the "Salvage Corps" of which I am the originator. The women and girls of England are sure doing their bit in this war. Will tell you about them some other time. I am disgracefully healthy. So long.—"POWDER JESS."

A WOMAN comrade of our writer's brigade. They are few and far between but always assured of friendly welcome. Greeting to Louise Rice, who gives us a story for the first time and introduces herself according to Camp-Fire custom:

This matter of discussing myself bothers me a little. I've never done any self-exploiting, nor allowed any one else to do it for me. However, I guess there really is an excuse for it in this case, if I am to be admitted to ADVENTURE'S family, for if I write about thugs and bums and longshoremen and tramps, etc., as I'm likely to do, some of your men readers will be wondering how on earth I know anything about what I'm writing about.

I THINK a little story will illustrate how I happen to know more about the rough life of the world than the majority of women. I was coming home from the opera one night and, as it was unusually mild, my escort and myself started to walk home through Madison Square Park. Coming the other way, from tending his boilers in a well known building on Twenty-third Street, came an acquaintance of mine. I would gladly have evaded him, but he planted himself before me, looked me up and down and inquired, in amazement:

"Fer th' love o' Mike, Lou, where'd yuh get them glad rags?"

HE KNEW me merely as a rather dingy person who had chatted with him, off and on, for a year, as he stood taking the air at his cellar steps, and, owing to a chance word of mine about running a typewriter, he had always taken it for granted that I was an underpaid and overworked stenographer. Be it recorded to his glory, and to the everlasting honor of what are known as "rough" men, that I have repeatedly made friends with them in just that way, and have yet to receive from one of them a word which would shame the finest so-called gentleman in the land.

I did not want this particular friend to see me in the "glad rags," because I did not want him to think that I had been anything but the real friend that I really was. So I had to explain, and, alas, I never got another entirely frank and unconscious word out of him! But thanks to my acquaintance of the previous year with him, I know, intimately and in detail, just what a man like him thinks and wants—and I believe I could tend his boilers, too.

IN FACT, I've known about every kind of man and a woman that there is, I guess. I've been a reporter, and a "rewrite" woman, and worked in a big advertising office, and in a motion picture "exchange" and run a restaurant and had a manicure shop, and got five dollars an hour for doing massage, and a dollar and a half an hour for running a gymnasium, where I had every sort of person, from kids of fourteen to old men of sixty, from shop-girls to society women. I'm really a pretty good farmer, and a well known graphologist (give you three guesses as to what that is!) and I love to cook and hate to sew, and if I've got a clean collar and cuffs on I think I'm dressed up enough to go anywhere.

I'm older than you'd think, and I can walk twenty miles, easy, and put my knuckles to the floor without bending my knees. Selah!—LOUISE RICE.

P. S. I forgot to tell you about the characters in "Skirts and Brats." All of them are real, and the story is mainly so. The names are correct. Red Jumbo, Smoky Mike, Blond Maggie, Chicago Bessie and Larry the Dip will probably be recognized if any of their old pals read the tale. Jumbo married Chicago Bessie, of course, and is the devoted step-daddy to the twins. Larry, brave fellow, died in trying to conquer his habit. There's rather a pathetic story about him which I may write, some time. I don't know what became of Blond Maggie, but I do know that she started out to earn her living in an honest way. The McGurk's where Jumbo lay up, in New York, waiting for his beard to grow, was the famous McGurk's, one of the best-known hang-outs of criminals in this country. On several occasions myself and an escort spent a long evening in that dreadful place, successfully impersonating habitués, and gathering all sorts of impressions, data and information about the underworld.

THAT was in the days when New York was "wide open." I spent nearly all of one year investigating the conditions of the lower East Side, for I could not believe that the stories which the newspapers were just beginning to print about it were true. I investigated, as long as I could stand it, and had to conclude that the half had not been even whispered.

And let me add just one word. You see a lot written about the "adventurous" life of criminals, about their "orgies" and their generally gay and daring lives. Well, believe me, the most dismal, gloomy, care-ridden people I have ever seen in my not exactly narrow life have been criminals. When they drink they fight, instead of singing. When they don't drink they fall into such depths of abysmal misery that even the worst of them would arouse pity. From which you can easily deduce any number of morals!

But in the above Miss Rice told so little of her real adventures that I wrote and protested. So she added what follows. But, even so, she hasn't really done justice to a life of adventures that would make many of the men look to their laurels. However, here's the bit more:

I have been out of town, which is the reason why I have not answered your request for more dope about what I thought I'd said more than enough about. I didn't mention the fact that I really can and have run an engine because that wasn't much of an adventure—a sewing-machine is more complicated! Any dub can do it.

I DIDN'T mention about roaming around with my friends, the Romanys, because that isn't much of an adventure, either. The safest place I know of for man or beast is a Gipsy wagon—also, you get splendiferous eats, and the roof is hail-proof, and the talk is beautifully absent. However, if you think it interesting to say to the readers of ADVENTURE that I've done those things, go right ahead. As an adventure, I have found making my living in New York by far the most exciting and hazardous undertaking I have ever attempted.

The Gipsies are really wonderfully interesting people, but they are not the murdering, knife-out, stealing, "wild" people of the usual fiction; not a-tall —which is the reason why editors uniformly refuse my stories about them!

I THOUGHT it was rather an adventure to shingle a house of mine, once—there was not the slightest danger in sitting on the ridge pole, but the battery of long range glances which poured upon me while I sat there was one of the most trying dangers I ever endured. I like to plow and harrow, too, which drew an interested ring of onlookers for several days of one radiant Spring. But my most unusual feat was to carry a new broom down three blocks of theatrical Broadway one day. It was not a stunt—a friend of mine, who had just rented a studio really needed it—but you would have thought that the Wild Man of Borneo Had Just Come To Town. Things like that leave me utterly bewildered. *Why* do so many people in this very interesting and natural world connive to make simple and natural actions so difficult? But that's nothing to do with me or this adventurous life of mine that you insist on, has it?

I COUNT as the really wonderful adventures of my life the many, many unusual and wonderful people whom I have met—not necessarily well known people, although there are a good many of them, but the rare human types, the man or woman who has been and gone and done things, and couldn't write a word about them to save their necks! If I ever write any *good* stories I'll deserve no credit. It will just be a rehash of what those big people have *done*. Come to think of it, I guess my friendships are my true excuses for cumbering this already over-populated earth—I'm a sort of licensed singer, like those bards of old who earned their board and room by reciting the deeds of those more worthy than themselves, and far, far greater—LOUISE RICE.

ORDER of the Restless. Wayne Eberley, its secretary, asks to have it bulletined that, because of the long interval between the announcement of the formation of the society and the date on which constitution and blanks were finally ready, nearly half of the letters he mailed out to inquirers were returned by the post-office. Quite plainly the inquirers are entitled to be ranked among the Restless, since an address reaches them for so short a time. If those who thus missed their replies from Mr. Eberley will write him again, giving their present addresses, he will be glad to write again in his turn. For his address, see "*Adventure's* Free Services and Addresses" on a following page.

FROM E. S. Pladwell a word about the real facts behind his story in this issue:

Oakland, Cal.

The real story was not much like mine. It was grimmer but rottener. The missionary cleaned up the natives, established law and order of a sort, learned to live among them, took a native girl as concubine, achieved a taste for the native ferment-juice, and finally left this pleasant world by means of a suicidal revolver. In newspaper parlance, there was "no story."—E. S. PLADWELL.

AN INQUIRY from our comrade E. A. Brininstool concerning Captain Drannan:

If there is any old Army officer who saw Indian fighting on the plains anywhere from 1860 to 1886, or who took part in the Apache wars or the Modoc war, or who knows the particulars of the rescue of the Oatman girls from Apaches, I would like to ask if he ever heard of a man named Captain Wm. F. Drannan, author of a book entitled "Thirty-One Years on the Plains." Drannan's photo, the frontispiece of the book, shows an old man about seventy-five, in a buckskin suit, and is signed by himself as "Chief of Scouts."

DRANNAN alleges he was raised by the celebrated Kit Carson, and that he was later a companion of old Jim Bridger, Jim Beckwourth, "Buffalo Bill" and other frontier celebrities. I went carefully through the book and counted the number of Indians alleged to have been slain either by him in person or killed by companion "scouts" and himself, or by troops for whom he scouted, and his own figures give the astounding number of 609 redskins. The book has 586 pages. I only counted dead Indians in fights in which Drannan says he took part.

Drannan says he also scouted for Gen. George Crook in Arizona, Gen. Conner, Gen. Wheaton, Col. Elliott and Gen. John C. Frémont. He recites that he personally captured Capt. Jack, chief of the Modocs, personally rescued Alice Oatman from captivity among the Apaches, and was more or less prominent in other Indian scrimmages and campaigns.

I HAVE read about everything of a historical nature that I can get hold of concerning all our Indian campaigns, but in no book, article, story or any written documents of Indian campaigns have I ever seen this man's name mentioned in any capacity—much less as "chief of scouts." I know a great many old-time Indian fighters personally and many Army officers who were on the plains from '66 to '90, and none of them ever heard of Scout Drannan.

If this catches the eye of any men who served in the regular Army from '66 to '90—whether private or officer, I would like to hear from them. Now then, speak up, you old boys! Who knows anything about Capt. Wm. F. Drannan, Chief of Scouts?—E. A. Brininstool.

IN A letter written in February Captain George Ash asks to have it announced to his friends that he is in Japan and Korea, doing well.

THESE stories of Hugh Pendexter's do more than entertain us. He has studied the American Indian for years and his tales not only bring vividly before our eyes the early years of our country's history but can be relied upon for accuracy in both detail and spirit. They make the Indian and pioneer of the past a living reality.

I find I'm breaking rules and praising at Camp-Fire some of our own stories, but perhaps you'll make allowance for the fact that I'm speaking of them not because of their fiction value but because they are doing exactly what some of you (I'm glad to say) are doing—telling us facts about the days of the frontier that has moved westward across our country three thousand miles in three hundred years.

ANOTHER story in this issue, "The Devil's Dagger," performs a similar service as to the Scotland of the old days. I like these stories of old times mixed in with those of the present day and, judging from your letters and talks, most of you feel the same way. But they must be dependable in fact and atmosphere or the value and interest are greatly lessened. Comrades Bishop and Brodeur, like Comrade Pendexter, know whereof they write. Both have for years been students of past civilizations, and Mr. Brodeur—well, he reads the old sagas in the original and little things like that.

Now here's a little "dope on the side" from Mr. Pendexter on his story in this issue:

Norway, Maine

The story was suggested by the sacred myth of the Cherokee concerning the Raven Mocker, which, according to James Moony in his authoritative work on Cherokee mythology, was the most dreaded of all wizards and demons. The Cherokee firmly believed in the Raven Mocker. Once when Mr. Moony was among the Cherokee he says (page 504, "Myths of the Cherokee") "A sick man was allowed to die alone because his friends imagined they felt the presence of the Raven Mocker." The same authority says, "The grewsome belief in The Raven Mocker is universal among the Cherokee and has close parallel in other tribes." And he cites as an example the Iroquois belief in the "cannibal ghost."

AS THE time of this story is about 1730, or after the Shawneee had been driven to the Ohio, the superstitious fears of the white traders are plausible. The execution of witches in New England was less than forty years away. In speaking of another myth of the Cherokee, Mr. Moony says, "The faith in the existence of the miraculous Little Deer is almost as strong and universal to-day (1897-98 ed. "Myths of the Cherokee") among the older Cherokee as is the belief in a future life." On commenting on the talismanic power attached to the consecrated down of the young antler of the deer the same author remarks: "So firm was the belief that it had influence over 'anything about a deer' that eighty or a hundred years ago even white traders used to bargain with the Indians for such charms in order to increase their store of deerskins by drawing trade to themselves." I cite this to prove readiness of whites to accept Indian beliefs.

The raven "dives" while flying by folding one wing close to the body, falling and, says Moony, "apparently turning a somersault." The cry given at such times is described as being entirely different from the ordinary cry of the raven.

THE old stage route between Knoxville and Harper's Ferry practically followed the Great Indian War Trail. The Cherokee and other Indians generally believed they would become what they ate.

Usunhiyi—"where it is always growing dark," is used in myths and sacred formulas to denote the West. The land of the dead, or "Ghost Country," is situated in Usunhiyi. It is called Tsusginai. The common word for west is *wudeligunyi*—"there where it (the sun) goes down."

It is told by the Cherokee that in 1747 two Mohawks killed more than twenty in stealthy attacks on the Lower Towns. During the Spring and Summer their adroit ambuscades caused the Cherokee to believe they were wizards or witches—Hugh Pendexter.

SOME time ago we had a letter from our comrade W. E. Brandon telling his experiences in a Central-American earthquake. Here is one written nearly a year ago, telling about the unique job of building a railroad on hot lava, and a third dated in 1918. These letters were written to our comrade W. C. Tuttle, whose stories are part of our regular diet—this friendship between a man in San Salvador and another in Spokane who have never seen each other being another sample of the personal friendships growing up through our Camp-Fire.

LA LAVA, KILOMETRO 69-72, SALVADOR, C. A.

DEAR FRIEND TUTTLE:—Your very welcome and interesting letter came in yesterday. I will try to make this a connected letter, old-timer, but can't say that I shall. I ate a lot of cucumbers yesterday and for a wonder that old stomach of mine reniged. I can generally eat anything that is too thick to drink, or drink anything that is too thin to eat. But this time it failed. I got a "tummy-ache" and then thought I would cure it by taking a good shot of "hootch." I don't yet know if it was the cucumber salad or the hootch that put me on the blink, but naturally I lay it to the former. Anyway, I happened to be down at a town named Sonsonate (pretty nearly like Cincinnati, eh?), and was staying at a hotel. I sure passed a hi-yu night of it, griping with what resembled a cross between a baby with the colic and a full-grown hombre with the ptomaine poison. But I dug myself out in time for the first train this morning and arrived here on the job and found out that one of my engineers had stolen my hand-car last night and had taken a bunch to a nearby town and got them all hi-yu drunk and they had a fight with machetes on the way back and disabled several, and what was worse, broke my hand-car. Oh, this life in the tropics is ——.

NOW, I'll go back to the start and tell you the news: I think I told you that after I had volunteered for relief work and had done quite a bit of that, after the earthquake, I felt the pressing need of a few simoleons. About that time the Red Cross asked me to construct their building for them at my own price. I told them that I had no money to offer for Red Cross work but that if they would buy the material and pay for the labor I would do the construction for them, donating my work instead of money. As the officers of the Red Cross knew that I was broke they mentioned this offer frequently, so I got quite a rep.

Then I began to get offers at good prices in construction work. I started in that business and took in a partner who had almost as much money as I had, but who was a good hustler. I began to make money. But I had to work, old top. I worked literally day and night. Many a night I spent making elevations and setting my blue prints for the morning sun, and then spent the entire day in managing my gangs of men and wondering where I would land the money for the pay-roll that week. But I got the reputation and the business. I enclose one of my cards.

WHILE I was at this business, the railway whose letter-heads I am now using, 'phoned me and asked me to come down to see them. I replied that I was too busy. The general manager then came down to see me and wanted me to take charge of a certain job for them. I told them that as it would take me out of the city I could not do the work for them—if they could get any one else. They tried and then they asked me to at least go down and see the work and give them a report on what I thought of it, they to pay any sum that I demanded for my time so consumed and all expenses for the trip. I agreed to that if the trip would not occupy more than three days of my time.

AND here was the job: When the volcano broke loose it opened several new craters. An immense flow of lava from one of these ran down and covered a portion of the railroad about a mile and a half long to a depth of from eighteen to thirty feet of hot lava. The right-of-way troubles, etc., allow them to occupy only their old right of way. In other words, the job was to build a railroad over hot lava—a stunt never before pulled off in the history of mankind. Well, I have never seen a job that scared me. I walked across the lava, over the proposed route. I smothered in sulfur fumes, I ran over white-hot rocks, and sprinted through blue flames. I felt the crust give under my feet and jumped for other points which also gave way—for all I knew into an inferno of molten rock below. But I went back and told them the road could be put across in three months. They then wanted to know if I would take the job. I told them I would not, on contract, but that I would do it for them if they would pay all expenses and for my superintendence would pay me a certain sum per week. They snapped at it. So there you are; I'm the engineer in charge of this work, and am making good. Instead of getting across in three months, I will make it in between six and seven weeks.

DID you ever see lava? Hot lava, especially? It does not look like I had supposed. When it first comes from the crater it appears to be a mass of flames. At that time it is, of course, in a molten state. But it partially solidifies rapidly. Then the pressure behind breaks up this partially solid rock and rolls and tumbles it forward in a rugged mass which might be likened to a badly plowed field of some mythological giant. Portions stay boiling and spout out flames and sulfurous smoke, like miniature volcanoes. Other parts partly cool, but have no grain like natural rock or granite.

I HAVE had my troubles. No one knew anything about such a job. I had to go it blindly. The only way I have succeeded is because I know how to work the people. I know their language, their viewpoint, the arguments that get under their skin, I know when to be severe with them, and when to treat them in a patriarchal, or better said, a feudal manner. In other words, I get harmony of action from the five to six hundred laborers and thirty to forty employees I am using. I will succeed. But the troubles have been many. I have run across rock so hard that it would turn the finest chisels; it was so hot I could not use dynamite. It would burn up before even the shortest possible fuse could reach the cap. Using a chisel for fifteen or twenty minutes, it would begin to glow dull red, lose its temper, and double over under the blows like a piece of iron just taken from the forge. The rock was so hot that the men could stand on it for only a short time per trick. At one time I had gangs shoveling white-hot stone, their shovels wrapped in blue flame, and the bed of lava thundering and cracking under their feet. It is a job the like of which will probably never be seen again.

Anyway, I have gotten the line over about halfway already and when the general manager and his staff came down last Saturday and looked it over they told me they were more than satisfied and intimated if I went ahead the way I was going that there might be a substantial bonus in it for me at the end. I wonder what will happen this time to break me again? If I ever get any money and live to spend it, I think the shock will probably kill me.

WELL, that is enough of my vicissitudes. I was tickled to hear that your honeymoon had passed so gloriously, and I hope that the rest of your lives will be only a continuation of the honeymoon. I don't blame you at all for raving a bit over your wife. You have ample reason to do so. If an ornery, sour-dough artist who admits beginning to get bald-headed can get a wife like that, I wonder what a good-looking fellow like myself might do? And I can tell you, from experience, friend o' mine, you'll never meet up with the good times in other parts that you enjoy in your own teepee. I often wish that my life had been laid in different lines, but —well, there is no use bewailing the mandates of kismet. I am doomed, like the wandering Jew, to keep always on the move, and suppose I shall eventually kick in, like a desert rat—with my shoes on (if I own any) and glorying in the life I've led, even if repenting the death I die. Anyway I know that when I do kick in I will have LIVED. I'm a bit like the old-timer who had soused up with hootch for years and was finally told by the doctor that he would have to quit drinking or go blind. His reply was: "Wal, derned ef I haint seen nigh all th' world I want to see, anyhow."

I DON'T get much war news down here. I used to when I was in the Legation, but here it is scarce. I want to get into that scrap, but I've got to get a few ducats together first for my two sons in the States. From all indications I will have all kinds of time to get into it yet. Although I am getting past the age I did not think I would have great trouble getting into it, for I believe I told you that I am an ex-regular soldier from Spanish-American war times. In fact, I am a member of the Post of Spanish-American War Veterans in Everett, Washington, where I resided for a time a few years ago. I think I told you about that, did I not?

Must end this for a time and do some work.

Here is the later letter:

January 8, 1918,
San Salvador, El Salvadore, C. A.

Have tried to die of Black-Water fever—the most pernicious of fevers—worse than the yellow jack. Then I had amoebic dysentery. But I finished the job! If I had given up I might have saved my health, but I am bull-headed. I am now on my feet again and shall probably go at once to Guatemala City at the request of President Estrada Cabrera, to take charge of the reconstruction of that city. Don't know how I happened to not be in that earthquake.

MY ILLNESS left me broke again. I made a few thousand out of the job, and finished in six weeks. The Company treated me all right, but doctors, nurses, hotels and special diet got it all. I knew I couldn't live to really enjoy all that coin.

But I shall be in the States soon—along in the Spring. If I am flush, look for me. If I am broke well, I may hit the back door for a handout.

Won't write much as I have an engagement in about an hour which means some filthy lucre and I am pretty weak and nervous yet. Will write again very soon and give my address.—Brandon.

A WORD from one of our comrades on the French front. And I wonder how many of us altogether are over there doing their bit? Here's our good luck to our comrade who writes us and to all the others.

Somewhere in France.

When we arrived in this country it was sure cold and it rained or snowed pretty near all of the time, which made it worse. When the weather got a little warmer we were greeted by mud. It was mud with a capital M, for every step we would take we had to be careful so it wouldn't pull our boots off it stuck so. But now we can't complain, we're having real warm weather and most of the mud is dried up.

FRITZIE gets real fresh sometimes and throws some shells over, but he quiets down quick when the Sammies start shooting back at him. Fritzie don't like to taste his own medicine.

I've seen a couple of air fights and, believe me, it's interesting and exciting. The way those aviators can handle their machines is simply wonderful. When I read about them I used to think it was impossible, but now I've seen for myself. A German machine was brought down not far from here the other day and if you could have seen how quick the boys stripped it of souvenirs you'd have laughed.

When the anti-aircraft guns start banging away we like to see where the shells break. It looks as if little puffs of smoke were following the aeroplane but it really is the shells breaking. I like to stand and watch how close the shells land. I think it's a lucky shot that can bring one down.—Gustave Schimelfanning.

TODAY comes news that two more of our writers' brigade have joined the colors. Dr. J. U. Giesy, having made attempt after attempt and undergoing an operation in order to meet physical requirements, writes me joyfully that he has at last been commissioned in the Medical Corps of the United States Army. And from Europe comes a post-card saying, "Greeting to *Adventure* from 'Somewhere in France.'—George Rothwell Brown."

I HAD a recent letter from our comrade Harold S. Lovett, the marine who was on *H. M. S. Agamemnon* at the Dardanelles. But this letter was postmarked at New York. A previous letter, which is coming to you at one of our Camp-Fires, had told me he was now gunner on a merchant ship with one U-boat credited to his marksmanship. The other day he appeared in person and we had a good visit together and I hope to be seeing him whenever he's in port.

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will give twenty-five cents apiece for copies containing my stories—"*The Greenstone Mask*," "*Gold Lust*," and "*The Island of the Dead*." Write and I will send money and necessary postage.
Address—J. ALLAN DUNN, care of *Adventure*.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp, at the Front, or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

R. E. ABBOTT, No. 1,045,866, Canadian Forces, France.

OVE NELSON, care of *Adventure*.

ROY T. YELTON, care of *Adventure*.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts

Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1

B. W. Brintnall, 5527 33d Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2

Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Tucker.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1

Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2

Hapsburg Liebe, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3

Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1

E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2

Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and
Mexico Part 1

J. W. Robertson, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2

J. W. Whiteaker, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1

Robert E. Pinkerton, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2

S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3

George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4

Ed. L. Carson, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake, Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5

Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
Edgar Young, 415 Eighth Ave., Huntington, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
Gordon McCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports: hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
Robert Welles Ritchie, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Captain A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada, Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo

Charles Beadle, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Plantations and Trading in the South Seas

Question:—"I am interested in the South-Sea Islands, but do not know an iota about the subject. I would like to know how much money it would take to go into the plantation business; how much profit could be made based on capital invested, and what is raised on the plantations? About trading. What do you trade and for what do you trade it to the natives? Can you give me a list of books or pamphlets which I could get on the subject?"—Charles Gavelda, Clarksburg, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Works that would be of any practical help on the South Seas are scarce and expensive, and are published in England. I can not give you a list of books on the subject available in U. S. A. Your public libraries might help in this direction. After the war, if you apply to any of the steamship lines trading into the South Seas they will furnish you with guide-books which contain some information. The censor restricts the issue of such books, naturally, just now.

The amount of money needed to start as a planter in the Islands is also one which I can not do justice to. It is all a matter of personal equation—how large your ambition may be and the strength of your banking account. A man with money and enterprise and energy—and all are certainly needed in the Islands—should certainly give the ground a good look over before he invests. No earthly good taking my word for it. Who am I that any man should leave his home-land and invest his capital for me?

Almost anything can be raised in the Islands, but—as you will see by some of the notes I have already sent to the "Ask Adventure" pages—there are so many groups, and all have their specialty, therefore a definite direction upon your generalizing proposition is out of the question. If America and Australasia, plus Japan and Britain, insist that none of the South-Sea Islands shall go back to Germany, then we shall see great developments in the Islands. Cotton, for instance, now almost unknown there, will become a staple product.

At the present time the planters merely take off the surface what bounteous Nature gives with almost no effort—copra (the kernel of the coconut, from which a valuable soap-making oil is extracted), bananas (which are shipped to Australia and New Zealand), oranges. Rubber is a developing industry. In Papua, which the Australians captured from the Germans, gold has been found, and the Australian Government is now prospecting for oil.

The Islands are on the Equator, therefore hot. The natives generally are friendly toward the white man; and native labor is employed on the plantations. A good, well-kept plantation of any sort of product is a profitable investment, but experience is needed. If a man owned a small vessel he could trade among the Islands, and buy from the natives or planters. The difference between the planter and the trader is that one grows and the other buys for the outside market.

Hunting and Fishing in Arizona

Question:—"I am planning a limited hunting trip to the country lying north of Tucson, Arizona. Being raised east of the Mississippi River am ignorant of conditions outside of the Arizona cities. I expect to leave home in a party of three or four with a Winchester .22 repeating rifle for my own use. We expect to go in a Ford touring car and be gone for about two weeks. What kind of game will I find and what kind may I expect to kill with a .22 caliber rifle? What kind of game will the law allow me to kill during the months of April, May, June, July and August? What will a cheap but convenient camping outfit cost a party of three or four and what kind should we get? What kind of food should we carry and how much? What precautions should we take against animals and reptiles at night? What would be the farthest point we may expect to reach and return under ordinary conditions, traveling, say, three hours a day? Where may game and fish be found most plentiful in this region?"—H. B. Robinson, Tucson, Arizona.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—According to Arizona law you are not to kill any game in April and May. You can shoot doves and white wings after June 1st. There you are, and a mighty small bag of game you will get.

Get your camp-stuff prices where you are, as they differ from Los Angeles prices.

Consult some of the old-timers in Tucson—there are plenty of them—*and* your own appetite, plus the food administration rules about what to take in the way of grub. My habit has been to pack bacon, flour, rice, sugar, salt, baking powder, canned tomatoes and canned milk.

Personally, I would not expect to get any fishing till after I had gone well north of Florence, in the Gila Mountains. You have desert all the way from Tucson to Florence and beyond. If I were in Tucson and had a desire to fish and hunt, I would chase up to Roosevelt Dam and fish in the reservoir or Salt River or Tonto Creek. Trout season does not begin till June first. Other fish September first.

All the protection I want against animals is to have my gun handy. I don't know what animals would harm you, anyhow, since they are all far more afraid of you than you are of them. As for reptiles, a tent with canvas bottom sewed in and turned up across entrance to height of ten inches, is plenty. B. H. Dyas, 321-25 West 78th Street, Los Angeles, sells a water-proof tanolite tent like that. Write him for prices.

The distance you would travel in three hours, in a Ford, is dependent on roads and accidents. Can't tell you that.

Maine Fishing

Question:—"Will you let me know the possibility of bay and surf fishing either by casting or from a small boat or motor-launch; kind of fishing to be had, in what quantity they run, tackle necessary; bungalows or cottages that may be rented or board secured; weather conditions or clothes necessary; transportation methods and costs; accessibility of guides and their cost? Are licenses necessary for salt-water fishing?"—Henry M. Goldstein, New York City.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—I am not as well posted on the bay and surf fishing on the coast of Maine, as on the inland stream and lake fishing. I think there is very little if any surf fishing, but there are plenty of fish to be had in the bays and off the coast.

They catch great quantities of cod, haddock, pollock, hake in the deep water, and in the bays, flounders, cunners, mackerel, etc.

Several years ago I made a number of trips to Small Point, which is situated some fifteen miles below the city of Bath at the mouth of the Kennebec River, for tautog fishing, or black fish, as some call them. This was good sport, the best I think I ever had for salt-water fishing.

There are plenty of cottages to be had, which can be rented from one week to the whole season, and the prices run from $1 per day up. Board in private families and hotels ranges from $7 per week upwards. Fishing tackle may be had from any of the small towns along the coast, and the outfit is not expensive.

Launches and guides may be had at very reasonable prices.

Transportation facilities are good, as most of the resorts can be reached by railroad or steamship lines.

Licenses are not required for salt-water fishing.

Trading in Central Africa

Question:—"Will you tell me what chances an ex-army man has in the trading business in Central Africa? I am in the Army at the present time, but would like to hunt up something when I get out. I am twenty-two years old and have had a little experience as trader in Mexico. I ran a small store for the American Mining Syndicate two years in N. W. Sonora. I have only a common school education but a strong constitution. I am a good photographer and can run a moving-picture camera. Will you give me the address of a couple of the trading companies that I could write to regarding a position as sub-agent in one of the interior stations? What would be the duties of a sub-agent?"—Sgt. E. W. Moon, San Antonio, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—Write to: Niger Company, Surrey House, Victoria Embankment, London, Eng.; Lever Brothers, Royal Lever Bldg. Liverpool, Eng. (O. & F. Dept.); The African Association, 43 Castle St., Liverpool; Messrs. Pinnock, Ltd., Harley Bldgs., 1101 Hall St., Liverpool; Alex. Miller & Bros., 34 Beaufort Rd., Liverpool; Messrs. W. B. McIvor & Co., Ltd., Colonial House, Water St., Liverpool; African Traders Co., 42 Drury Bldgs., Liverpool; Benin River Produce Co., 23 Alexander Bldg., Ormond St., West Liverpool, Eng.

State age and experience.

I think you ought to make it, especially if you can keep accounts. The pay is not attractive at first, but a likely young fellow will come out all right. Of course these companies are going to think twice before they hire a stranger they have never seen, and by far your best chance is to work passage to Liverpool and go round the offices; write for appointment when in Liverpool.

Several of my correspondents, however, have secured jobs with above-named firms by simply writing. Conditions, however, will be very different when the big armies are disbanded. There will be many thousands looking for such berths.

The duties of a sub-agent cover such help as he can give the agent in clearing the stern-wheelers and freight canoes that bring goods from port and take back the rubber, palm kernels, etc.; and helping in the barter store, writing up the ledgers, until the agent goes home or is transferred, when he becomes agent. No intelligent person remains sub-agent more than a few months.

The contract usually calls for three years.

Geology in Tennessee

Question:—"I am very much interested in the study of plant life, geology and mineralogy and am contemplating a trip if I can find a suitable place. Are there any veins of silver, lead or gold within the boundaries of Tennessee that have not already been worked? In the study of geology I delight in the exploration of caves and climbing steep cliffs. If there is anything in Tennessee worth while, could you inform me?"—H. CARL MARMON, Tennessee City, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—As to minerals, I do not actually know of any veins of silver, lead, or gold within this State that have not been worked. Every now and then some native of these hills back here thinks he has found something valuable, but it has always, so far as I know, turned out to be something else. However, here's something I'll tell you for what it may be worth:

There used to be an iron furnace at Embreeville, some 15 miles from here, in the hills. This outfit is now digging zinc, and, I understand, in great quantities. One of their men told me last Summer that there was lead in the neighborhood of the zinc mines. His name is Gudger Stewart; you might write him.

In regard to "exploring caverns and climbing steep cliffs,"—you should find plenty of that sort of thing, notably steep cliffs, between here and Cranberry, N. C., a distance of 35 miles. Also, the new C. C. & O. Railway, which passes through here, can show you some great stuff. In the mountains back of Tellico Plains, which is at the end of a short railroad running back from Athens, this State, you will find wonders—also, if you aren't careful, some moonshiners that were real bad when I knew them. The noted Clingman's Dome and Ho Knob are in this section.

Summer Cruises in Canada

Question:—"On the map one can go up the Maniconagun River to Lake Kaniatichan; north branch of the lake curves south and according to scale comes within twleve miles of the center branch of the Big River. Big River runs west into James Bay. The Abitibi connects James Bay with Abitibi Lake which is again touched by G. T. P. Ry. Is it feasible to make this trip by canoe? Is a portage of the length indicated feasible in that country? How long would trip take going along easily without loafing and without paddling your arms out? What would be a reasonable cost? Would one guide be enough? Is canoe and other equipment obtainable from guide? How late in the Fall could I start and, taking things easy, get out before waters freeze up?"—O. S. GRIFFITH, Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—Of your listed queries all rest on the first and second. I would hardly care to advise the cruise over the waters you indicate inasmuch as the trip is one that is hardly practical and the map details without doubt are absolutely estimated and inaccurate.

The Abitibi route is, of course, one of the most used so-called "James Bay" routes of all. Personally, I would not recommend a trip over any from the standpoint of comfort, scenery, game, etc. It's too much hard work, too much poling and portaging and there is little at the northern end from a scenic standpoint.

Far better are the cruising waters contiguous to the Height of Land watershed, in a far superior scenic region, with far better fishing and in a region showing far more game of all kinds; the main wild-life seen on the James Bay end is wild-fowl and geese.

Following are two suggested three or four week cruises that I would much prefer for an all-round canoe trip, combining A-1 fishing, fine scenery, enough white water to satiate any reasonable fellow, and the sight of all kinds of moose and other life—viz.:

(1) From Amos, on the Transcontinental Line, 138 miles east of Cochrane, in N. W. Quebec, south through the Harricanaw head-waters—the Harricanaw also runs through to James Bay—thence over the famous "Ottawa" portage into the Upper Ottawa River and down it some 40 or 45 miles—affording some exciting "white" stuff and fine fishing—to the outlet of the Kenojevis River; turning up this river some 14 miles and thence through the Kiekiek Lakes, stretch out on big Kewagana Lake and continuing through to Seal's Nome Lake again, back to Amos. On a 21-day trip in August I'll venture you could see from 35 to 85 or even more moose, as well as beaver, otter, fox, lynx and all kinds of black duck, etc. Fishing A-1.

(2) From "O'Brien," 30 miles west of Amos, south through Lois Lake and over the two new salmon and trout lakes lying on the Height of Land, crossing into the Kenojevis and down through its waters going through the Upper Ottawa Lakes and river coming out at Ville Marie or Haileybury—a splendid 21-day trip in August, affording sight of moose, etc., and A-1 fishing.

For either of these trips I can undertake to arrange for a capable guide, canoe and everything but your personal clothing and fishing tackle, at a definite cost for either 21 or 28 days.

August will afford best chances to see most game, but September affords the open hunting season.

Betel-Nut

Question:—"I have seen lots of items about the betel-nut and wonderful results obtained from its use. Do you know anything about it? Can you give me the address of a man from whom I can procure some? I understand that betel-nut enables one to undergo great fatigue."—C. B. RAMSEY, Sandidges, Va.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—The betel-nut is simply the nut of a climbing pepper. It is grown mostly in the Malay States and islands adjacent, and India. The nut itself is about the size of a hazelnut, though it grows in a membranous covering as big as a small potato. The people who chew this stuff cut the nut into pieces, wrap a piece in lime and the leaf of the betel, and then chew it. As for tremendous stamina-giving properties, I don't know of them. The habit stains lips and mouth a glaring red color; but preserves the teeth and imparts a more or less pleasant odor to the breath.

Perhaps the herb you are thinking of is the coco. That is grown in South and Central Americas, and the coco leaf, chewed, does give wonderful vitality and staying power. It is, of course, the base of cocaine, and habitual use has almost as evil an effect as the drug itself. In chewing this leaf, the South American native uses ashes or lime with it, just as the Malay does with his betel. This hastens the extraction of the juices.

The only thing I can suggest is that you write to some big importers, either South American or East Indian, and ask them if they can supply small quantities. You might get the coco leaves at a good drug-store, but I don't think you'll get the betel that way. A very good firm to try for the coco is W. R. Grace, Hanover Square, New York. But as these people are simply large merchants, and conduct no small business, perhaps they would not bother with a small order. But I think they would at least inform you where these herbs can be got. I have personally secured small parcels of coco locally, but it was before the war, and since that I have been unable ever to get any. That is the reason I can not tell you more satisfactorily where you may get the stuff.

To wind up perfectly candidly, I don't advise you to acquire either of these habits. If you propose going on tremendously fatiguing expeditions in the Andes, or in South America generally, you will find in such places that the guides or natives can supply you with all the coco you need. Both of these things are very well in their place. They are simply dope, though, and as such should not be fooled with.

Chances in Upper Congo and Uganda

Question:—"Kindly inform me of the opportunities and adventures offered in the Upper Congo and Uganda to a healthy young man of twenty-two years of age with steamship and clerical experience. Would be willing to go in at anything if I could get the right opportunity or adventure."—James G. Valcos, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—In the Upper Congo and Uganda there is elephant and big-game shooting generally; but small opportunities except for trading for which you would require considerable capital as well as experience. Most of the white men there are in Government service, mining or rubber, and obviously your clerical and steamship experience would be of little value there. Nearly all clerical work is done by Goanese and Indians. The Rhodesias have plenty of openings in agriculture and mining; but again your experience is of no particular value there.

Your best chance to get in would be with one of the many firms trading on the West Coast where your steamship life would be an asset.

I do not even mention the Transvaal as I take it that you want to get a job with some chance of adventure attached.

The Effect of the Tropics

Question:—"I read in *Adventure* about the sun and other things 'getting' a white man in Africa. Is this condition temporary or permanent? Would a three-years stay in Africa so reduce the blood that you could not stand cold climates such as Canada and Alaska again?"—Thomas L. Coate, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—Three years in the tropics should not effect any permanent physical injury. One soon reacclimatizes. Canned foods and the heat enervate one and thin the blood, but one soon recovers back home. The worst effect is not physiological but psychological. After the lazy life and freedom of the tropics it is hard for one to settle back into the humdrum and commonplace; hard to return to regular employment, to punching a time-clock or sitting at a typewriter or clerking. But that is an individual matter of will and ambition.

There are just now no direct steamship lines from America to the Congo. You would have to reach West Africa via Liverpool, Southampton, Hamburg or Havre, in peace times, though just now the Elder Dempster Steamship Co. and the West African Line. The ports of call en route are Funchal, Madeira; Las Palmas, the Grand Canaries; Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, and such Gold Coast ports as the freight and passengers call for.

A Trip in the Canal Zone

Question:—"A party of four wish to take a trip up the Segovia River in Honduras, next November with the idea of prospecting for gold. We wish to obtain information as to camp equipment, supplies, if carriers can be hired and if trade goods are included. If conditions will permit we thought of staying in the interior for twelve or fourteen months. Where can I obtain literature on metallurgy? What part of the Canal Zone, would you advise for prospecting for gold? Where are the moon, or canal, stones found—are they deep within the earth or on surface?"—Edward A. McMahon, Pedro Miguel, C. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—My suggestion would be to go to Corinto, on the Pacific side, and then go by rail to Leon or some other city on the railroad and then strike out and go overland from there to the headwaters of the river. Getting up the Segovia is a difficult matter. It is much easier to come down. Without you have your own boat you will find the native prices very high, asking as much as eighty-eight dollars per ton to transport freight halfway up the river. There are several English and American owned mines in the western half of Nicaragua and Honduras where you could get a look at the native ores first hand. The San Juancito mine in Honduras has produced about twenty million dollars in gold up to the present time.

As far as placer mining is concerned, you can get any prospector to show you how it is done in a few minutes. Call on Mr. C. W. Northrop, in the dispatcher's office of the Panama Railroad at Ancon, Canal Zone, and ask him to tell you about the native ores and how to look for placer mines. Get him to introduce you to a native cholo who has prospected for him. Mr. Northrop is an old friend of mine and will do anything he can for you if you tell him that I sent you. Get him to suggest a good book on metallurgy, or better yet get him to loan you one.

There is gold up the Gatuncillo River from Gatun. I knew five men who went up there and made wages with a sluice box in 1908, but I can not say whether the lake has covered up this ground or not.

The moon, or canal, stones you speak of were found in the gravel pumped from the bed of the Chagres River. There was a pile of this gravel near Gorgona, which is now under water, I am sure, which contained chucks of this stone. Get hold of Mr. Freehan, a depot agent at Corozal or some other station on Panama Railroad. He is an expert on stones of this kind and he and I have picked up many a stone along the canal. I feel sure he can tell you where some are to be found around there right now.

Get hold of Mr. E. R. Brewer by asking the Panama Railroad officials and get him to tell you how to prepare for a trip on foot through the jungles, and best of all get him to show you how to roll a blanket-roll into an overalls pack.

Bois Blanc Island, Michigan

Question:—"Will you kindly let me know what you can about Bois Blanc Island in upper Michigan, as regards residence, climate, hunting, fishing, automobile laws, estimated valuation of the land, etc.?"—THOMAS C. KURTZ, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Bois Blanc Island, in northwestern Lake Huron, possesses delightful Great Lake climate in Summer; cool, comfortable, with occasional warm days—probably ninety degrees; write Weather Bureau, Washington, D. C., for reports covering weather and climate. Winters, hard, grim, snow and cold, and communication often interrupted with mainland by ice and storms. After November first, bad weather—winds, gales, rain and snow. Lake fishing is excellent, fine motor-boating, but I question motoring as a pastime.

As for real-estate values; write to Postmaster, Bois Blanc, Mackinac County, Michigan, and ask for addresses of real-estate dealers, but on this point you could check up prices asked by writing to county clerk of Mackinac County, at St. Ignace, Michigan, for information about assessed values—probably much under market values. The postmaster at Bois Blanc could probably give you some idea of values, himself; also, some idea of the game. Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, Detroit, Michigan, for steamer folders, and connections.

These Michigan and Huron islands are largely occupied by fishermen and rafters, with some Summer population as at Mackinac Island, and, I believe, much fewer on Bois Blanc. I believe, too, that there are a few Indians on Bois Blanc, but am not sure. The postmaster would tell you the population, and the local business, which will very likely include some stock-raising and farming, as well as fishing, rafting, wrecking or towing.

The State Historical Society, Lansing, Michigan, would doubtless refer you to published descriptive matter covering this island, of recent date—magazine articles, etc., covering some of the features you inquire about.

Australian "Bushmen"

Question:—"I am very much interested in the Australian bushman and his customs. I understand that the older men of the tribes form clubs and treat the younger ones very badly. Is this so? Please give me any information available as regards customs, manners and location."—E. D. WAGNER, Montgomery City, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—What you know as the Australian "bushman" is a species of tramp who plods his way through the endless miles of the back country of Australia, lazing his life away and working only at occasional small jobs on farms or sheep "stations." The term "bushman" is also used to designate the real workers of the bush country but I judge from your letter that you refer to those of the order of tramps who, otherwise known as "swagmen" and "sundowners," have become a very strange and interesting fraternity.

Far from being of the hobo class known in this country the bush tramp of Australia is often well educated and honest, though naturally there are many who would answer to a poorer description. The "swagman," as he is generally known because he always carries a "swag" comprising his few personal needs rolled up in a blanket and swung across his shoulder, is well treated by the farming classes because he often comes in useful to perform small chores and to meet the demand for labor at the harvesting or shearing seasons.

It is customary to allow him a certain quantity of flour and tea even though he does no work for it and on this allowance he chiefly lives, making for himself a rough kind of bread known as "damper" and stewing his tea in a billycan which he always carries.

Following the "wallaby track," as the long bush trail is popularly called, is said by many to be a most fascinating occupation for those who have no ties and who have tired of city life. I met a Government official in London once who told me that he had done many adventurous things in life, but nothing called to him so insistently as the Australia bush where in sunshine and silence he had found himself drawn closer to nature than anywhere else he had been.

You refer in your letter to tribes. I wonder if you mean the blacks. If so I must tell you that the Australian aborigines have almost died out and excepting in parts of northern and central Australia which are otherwise uninhabited are rarely encountered in their original tribal state. I know of no such custom as you suggest. A great mistake is made by many people in thinking of Australian bushmen as blacks whereas in point of fact Australia is one of the "whitest" countries in the world. The few blacks that are left are of the lowest order of humanity, have few tribal customs left and are dying out so rapidly thet they will soon be entirely extinct.

Wintering in British Columbia

Question:—"My pal and I wish to spend a Winter some place in the Northwest, and have about decided upon British Columbia. Can you tell us of a place where the hunting and fishing are good? How are the chances for prospecting? How about the customs, regulations—would it be better to buy an outfit there?"—EDWARD D. COOK, JR., U. S. S. *Louisiana.*

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The Cariboo District seems to be about what you fellows are looking for. There is plenty of game there, a fair amount of fur, good fishing and a chance to prospect with a reasonable hope of success.

Get your outfit there where you will have some one to advise you as to what you need. It is impossible for any one to tell another man just what he will want. As you are aware, tastes differ especially as to what is really necessary for comfort. You will save all the trouble of transportation and customs while the price will be about the same.

With regard to the customs regulations, you can take in outfit by depositing with the collector of customs an amount equal to the duty which would be paid otherwise. If you return within six months and have your stuff identified this will be refunded to you.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR

McNELIS. (WILLIAM WHITE). Left home latter part of 1914. Last heard from in San Francisco, Cal., intending to go to Alaska. 5 ft. 6 in. tall, light complexion, light hair, blue eyes and always had an inclination toward playing baseball, usually as catcher. Mother very anxious to know whether he is still living.—Address WALTER McNELIS, 215 So. 9th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

NELSON, BENJAMIN EARL. Born October, 1883; is about 5 ft. 8 in. tall, has brown hair, one glass eye, and weighed about 150 lbs. Last heard from in California, 1911. Formally lived in Grand Rapids, Mich., and later in Seattle, Wash. Any one knowing anything at all as to his whereabouts please write to his sister.—Address MRS. ROSS PADEN, Ellamar, Alaska.

GLANMAN, ALL. Do you remember Detroit, Mich., 1917? Would like to hear from you.—Address LOIS PUCHER, 214 Fifth St., Milwaukee, Wis.

RUBLE, RALPH E., also known as R. E. RANDALL. Last heard of in San Antonio, Texas, Dec. 27, 1917. He was to leave that day for San Francisco. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address L. T. 369, care *Adventure.*

ALBRITTON, TOM. Left Mayfield, Ky., about 15 or 18 years ago. You should let your relatives know where you are. Also JESSIE B. ALBRITTON, née Tralle or Strickland, last heard of in Denver, Col., 12 years ago. Was then soon to be married; name of man not known—Address C. B. ALBRITTON, Clarksville, Tenn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BEAUMIER, AUSTIN. Formerly of Laramie, Wyo. Send your address or any one knowing whereabouts write to—Address HARRY M. HELLER, Co. A., 4th Battalion, Pascagoula, Miss.

THORTON, "VIC." Last heard from in New Albany, Miss., in 1915. Write to MIKE WHARTON, care *Adventure.*

MYERS, JESSE. Last heard of in New York City, 1915. Musician, plays slide trombone and was formerly in U. S. Navy. Former home somewhere in Ohio. Am anxious to hear from you.—Address MIKE WHARTON, care *Adventure.*

CROSS, LOUIS, who was with me on the U. S. S. *Michigan* 1912-1915. Formerly lived in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.—Address MIKE WHARTON, care *Adventure.*

BRUFFEY, ELMER, who was in Colon with me Fall of 1910. Last heard of in Hagerstown, Md., 1911.—Address MIKE WHARTON, care *Adventure.*

BERRY, NELLIE. Last heard of in Toronto, Canada. Any one knowing of her whereabouts would confer a great favor by writing to her brother.—Address THOMAS BERRY, Hot Springs, South Dakota, care B. M. S.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

RASNER, JOHN (JOHN WESTLEY). Left Philadelphia about two years ago and was last heard from in Newville, a small town near Harrisburg, Pa. Height, 5 ft. 6 in., light hair, blue eyes. Prominent baseball player. Recently he was reported to have been killed in action with Canadian Army in France but can not prove report.—Address MRS. MARTIE RASNER, 2331 Gerritt St. (Nr. 23rd and Reed), Philadelphia, Pa.

MISCELLANEOUS—Ingelow, Crump, Empey, Thurston, Nowell, Alexander Harrifield, Cassier; Sergeant Rome and Corporal Carroll.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Roy Ozmer, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays.—JACK P. ROBINSON.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. COX, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Beside the stories mentioned in the ad. on page 2, the Mid-September *Adventure*, in your hands on August 18th, will contain:

FORTY-NINE *By Robert J. Pearsall*
A story of the gold-rush days in the old West.

LUCK *By George L. Catton*
After gold again—but this time in the frozen streams of Alaska.

BEFORE MARQUETTE. Conclusion. *By Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton*
In which Dick Jeffreys takes the long trail back to Virginia—and what?

PEARLS OF GREAT PRICE *By J. Allan Dunn*
A stirring story of the South Sea Islands—and the daring skippers seeking fortunes among them.

A WARD OF THE STATE *By Thomas S. Miller*
Concerning a gambler who was a poor sport—and a quarry foreman who wasn't.

RED STICKS *By Hugh Pendexter*
Another tale of the red-blooded men who wrested our continent from the Indians.

UP-STREAM *By Harrison R. Howard*
A story of the sawdust country—and the kinds of men they produce there.

TIED UP FOR TOMBSTONE *By W. C. Tuttle*
In which *Magpie* goes in for newspaper publishing—with results.

MID-SEPTEMBER ADVENTURE

What would you do?

Suppose you told a good friend of your success and your good friend said, "I don't believe it!" What would you say?

Suppose *you* had hundreds of good-paying permanent positions to offer men who had a little spare time and who could use $5.00, $10.00, $20.00, $50.00 a month extra and I said, "It isn't so—it's a fake!" What would you do about it?

That is my case exactly.

What I've said about our subscription work is true. *It offers you an opportunity to make $5.00 to $250 00 a month.* It may take all your time or only a few minutes a day—you work when you please and where you please. And yet you say, "It isn't so."

What should I do about it?

There you go, week after week, scratching to make ends meet. And *if you would simply sell us fifteen or twenty minutes a day you could have all the extra money you need.*

But you won't believe me!

You could get a complete outfit, and prove what I say, by simply writing me, but you won't do it! What more can I say to you?

A three-cent stamp invested in writing me will put $100 into your pocket almost before you know it. Listen—every man and woman you know read magazines. They will read ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR and EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE. And they'll be only too glad to give their subscriptions to you. Why, subscriptions by the thousands are coming in to us direct because we do not have enough representatives to look after all the business. *Why don't you try it out?*

Instead of saying, "Oh, I can't do it"—be independent and drop me a line to-day and settle the argument for yourself.

HARRISON E. BILLER OF OHIO

Mr. Biller, whose picture is above, and hundreds of other men know what it means to receive a salary check every month. They know that what I say about subscription work is true.

This is what Mr. Biller says:

> **"Getting business for *The Delineator* and *Everybody's Magazine* during the past twelve years has been both pleasant and very profitable for me."**

And this is only one of hundreds of such letters I have before me. Why, I could fill this magazine with letters from men who have written in praise of our work and what it has meant to them.

But don't take their word for it. TRY IT OUT YOURSELF. We need some one to look after our interests right in your vicinity. Grab your pencil now, FILL IN THE COUPON AND MAIL IT AT ONCE.

Manager Subscription Agency Division
Butterick Building, New York, N. Y

GENTLEMEN:

Please send me full particulars regarding your subscription work.

Name ....

Street ....

City ....

State ....

French Women to the Rescue!

WHEN the black cloud of war broke over the fair plains of Artois, all France, with its heritage of dread, fell instantly to work to make every individual and every resource count. Food was the *woman's* problem.

Since the days of the Comtesse de Rebenac, in mediæval times, the women of France have been famous for their excellence and thrift in cooking.

As the years of war have swept on, black necessity has forced French housewives to the utmost limit of their racial genius to conserve the food.

Now that America is entered in the life-and-death struggle, we too face the duty, if not necessity, of avoiding all waste in food.

Under these circumstances, what more serviceable thing could be done than to set before the women of America the advice of their noble sisters of France, born of their tragic experience!

Alone of all American publications, The Delineator is in a position to do this; for we publish and send to France monthly a French edition of The Delineator *(Le Miroir des Modes)*, the largest and most influential magazine of its kind in France.

We appealed to the readers of the French Delineator to tell their American sisters how they are solving the food problem. We asked specifically for their best economical recipes. And hundreds of women in all sections of France have answered our appeal.

These recipes, as delicious as they are economical, are being given to American housewives each month in The Delineator. They will prove a revelation. Each one has been successfully tested by Honoré Willsie, the editor.

For instance, here is a recipe sent in by Mme. Louise Bocquet of the French town of Flers de l'Orne. It is a recipe for Hindu biscuits given her by a Hindu officer billeted at her house. The ingredients are simply one ounce of flour, one ounce of butter, one ounce of grated cheese.

The French recipes in one number alone will save you many times the price of a year's subscription. Do not miss any issue of The Delineator. It is a family necessity. *Invest* in it to-day.

The DELINEATOR

Butterick-Publisher